STARFUCKER

THE CATASTROPHIC CONJUNCTION OF VENUS & MARS

by

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Preface

"Mythology, like the severed head of Orpheus, goes on singing even in death and from afar."[1]

In the pages to follow we will endeavor to shed some light on the celebrated love affair between Mars and Venus. Far from being an old wives' tale lampooning the differences between the respective sexes, the "marriage" of the two planets signaled nothing less than Creation itself.

Why should anyone care about ancient traditions recounting the sexual escapades between Venus and Mars? Ancient myth represents, as it were, a narrative or mnemonic "fossil" reflecting the intellectual history of mankind. For untold millennia the narration and memorization of such stories remained the primary means of transmitting important information about the history of the world and the most treasured beliefs of early man. If we are to gain a better understanding of the origins of religion, philosophy, and natural science, it stands to reason that we would do well to study the content and message of ancient myth wherein such matters form an overriding concern.

Especially significant from the standpoint of modern science is the information encoded in ancient myth regarding the recent history of the solar system. Indeed, it is our contention that the eyewitness testimony of ancient man—as recorded in sacred traditions and rock art the world over—offers a surprisingly detailed and trustworthy guide for reconstructing that history.

*Starf*cker* is an exercise in mythological exegesis and, as such, builds upon and extends our previous findings. The first volume in this series of monographs investigating the fascinating and multifaceted mythology surrounding the various planets—*Martian Metamorphoses*—offered

[1] C. Kerényi, "Prolegomena," in C. Jung & C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton, 1969), p. 4.

an overview of Mars' role in ancient myth and religion. There it was documented that the red planet was typically represented as a raging war-god and as the greatest of heroes—as the quintessential masculine power. Archetypal examples of the Martian warrior-hero include the Greek Heracles, Sumerian Nergal, Vedic Indra, and Celtic Cuchulainn, amongst countless others.

The companion volume—*The Many Faces of Venus*—presented a comparative analysis of the sacred traditions surrounding Earth's so-called twin. In contrast to Mars, Venus was conceptualized as the prototypical female power. In fact, Venus was often represented as the red planet's paramour or consort. Familiar examples of the Venus-goddess include the Sumerian Inanna, Semitic Ishtar, and Greek Aphrodite but analogous figures will be found within virtually every culture.

The general thesis underlying all three monographs can be summarized as follows: If the testimony of the ancient skywatchers is to be believed, the Earth was a participant in a series of *recent* interstellar cataclysms of a virtually unimaginable nature—cataclysms that were devastating in effect and traumatic in psychological impact. It can be shown, moreover, that such catastrophes had a formative influence on the primary institutions of early cultures and thus their impact continues to be felt to this very day.

In what follows it is assumed that the reader has a general familiarity with the basic tenets of the so-called Saturn theory (see http://www.mavericksscience.com/saturn.htm for a brief synopsis).

Introduction

"The earliest home of the gods that we can discern is the sky."[2]

Much as the eyes can be said to offer a window to the soul so, too, does the study of ancient mythology offer a wealth of insight into the collective Psyche of early man. In fact, there is no other field of study that can provide a comparable amount of information regarding the innermost thoughts and religious sentiments of early man.[3]

For the better part of the past two centuries, the study of ancient mythology has served as a veritable Rorschach test by which one can best judge the interests and primary focus of the mythographer himself. Those scholars impressed by the central tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis reveal a marked tendency to view myth as a projection of forbidden sexual urges. Scholars otherwise disposed to emphasize the spiritual elements in human behavior and personality—foremost among whom are Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell—interpreted myth as an allegory of personal growth and individuation. Feminist authors, likewise, seek to expose the gender-biased aspects of ancient mythology while postulating a primordial matriarchy.

It is our goal here to set aside the theoretical "filters" and hidden agendas, as it were, and approach ancient myth from the vantage point of the mythmakers themselves. For the fact is that the original mythmakers themselves left little doubt about the primary purpose of myth—to describe and celebrate Creation as wrought by the gods *and* witnessed firsthand. The gods in question, it turns out, are identifiable with the most prominent celestial bodies. And so it follows that a systematic analysis of mankind's earliest and most treasured astronomical traditions forms an essential prerequisite to the proper understanding of ancient myth and religion.

[2] E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 227.
[3] Comparative linguistics and ancient art offer a good deal of insight as well, but not to the same level of detail or scope.

As the reputed Queen of the sciences, astronomy ranks amongst the oldest and most conscientiously practiced of scientific pursuits. Why this should be the case is not immediately obvious. Why would ancient cultures devote so much time and energy to tracking the stars when they had trouble just putting food on the table or defending themselves from marauding neighbors? The answer to this question was provided by the ancient skywatchers themselves: They were inspired to study the heavens because it was commonly believed that celestial events portended spectacular and potentially devastating cataclysms on Earth, including floods, thunderstorms, earthquakes, pestilence, and the downfall of kings and kingdoms.[4] In fact, the dire consequences of stars gone amok were deemed to be so important and potentially life-threatening that cultures around the globe offered up human sacrifices in a desperate attempt to propitiate the seemingly capricious celestial powers. Such sacrifices reached a truly horrific and mind-boggling scale in Mesoamerica, where hundreds of thousands of innocents were slaughtered in obsessive obeisance to the planets.

In ancient Mesopotamia similar beliefs prevailed. Assyrian kings, otherwise resolute in their arrogant display of absolute power, cowered like frightened children during eclipses and other celestial prodigies until a suitable human sacrifice could be offered as a substitute in their stead—all this in the fervent belief that such events portended the death of kings and the end of the world.[5]

The origin of such omens and sacrificial rites would be difficult to understand were they confined to one region alone, yet very similar beliefs and practices are to be found around the world, amongst so-called primitive cultures as well as the greatest of civilizations.[6] How, then, are we to account for the origin of the belief-system maintaining that the behavior of the planets portended disastrous events here on Earth? There would appear to be but one logical explanation for this apparently universal and surprisingly consistent set of beliefs: The planets *were* directly responsible for cataclysmic disasters here on Earth, the effects of which were felt by ancient

[4] See the valuable discussion in Lester Ness, *Astrology and Judaism in Late Antiquity* (1990), a dissertation for Miami University available online at: www.smoe.org/arcana/diss.html. See also D. Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* (Groningen, 2000), pp. 108-113.
[5] J. Bottéro, *Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 138-155.
[6] E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 15-23.

cultures everywhere. A systematic analysis of ancient astronomical lore will confirm this statement beyond any reasonable doubt.

An obsession with the planets and their comings and goings is apparent already in the earliest civilizations, suggesting that regular and anxiety-laden skywatching long predated the origin of civilization itself. Thus it is that the earliest cities in Mesopotamia—such as Uruk—betray a preoccupation with the observation and veneration of the planet Venus, known there as Inanna (see chapter two).

Native cultures on all inhabited continents provide abundant testimony with regards to their profound interest in celestial phenomena in general and in planetary behavior in particular. A brief sampling of such testimony must suffice for the purposes of this introduction, as the body of the present volume will bolster this claim in copious detail.

That the gods resided in the heavens was common knowledge to the ancient cultures of the world. As a direct consequence of this belief, a culture's corpus of star lore was deemed sacred and all-important—so important, in fact, that it was typically entrusted only to the best and brightest of pupils and repeatedly instilled every generation. The educational practices of the Australian Aborigines are representative in this regard:

"Although the knowledge of the heavenly bodies possessed by the natives may not entitle it to be dignified by the name of astronomical science, it greatly exceeds that of most white people. Of such importance is a knowledge of the stars to the aborigines in their night journeys, and of their positions denoting the particular seasons of the year, that astronomy is considered one of their principal branches of education. Among the tribes between the rivers Leigh and Glenelg, it is taught by men selected for their intelligence and information."[7]

[7] Quoted in P. Clarke, "The Aboriginal Cosmic Landscape of Southern South Australia," *Records of the South Australian Museum* 29:2 (1997), p. 129.

Virtually every anthropologist who has spent time with the Aborigines has called attention to the celestial motifs in their art, myths, and religious rites. Curr, for example, offered the following observation:

"Many tribes—I believe all—thought that the stars were intimately mixed up with their affairs. Some asserted that certain stars were the dwelling-places of the first fathers of their tribes."[8]

Interest in astronomical matters extended to the planets as well. In fact, anthropologists have documented that the Aborigines showed a "remarkable interest in the movement of the planets."[9] Special attention, interestingly enough, was focused on astronomical events believed to have occurred at the Dawn of Time—during the so-called Dreamtime—not on what one would normally call day-to-day astronomical observation. This point was duly emphasized by the astronomer Brian Maegraith in his survey of traditional sky lore amongst the Aborigines:

"Astronomical names and legends are not the products of individual native imagination, but are the result of tribal observations going back to ancient times. The knowledge is handed down by the old men to the boys at their initiation, and is carefully concealed from the women, who know practically nothing about the stars."[10]

The "sacred astronomy" practiced by the Australian Aborigines—characterized by its singular emphasis on primeval events and traditional knowledge—might well be considered typical for indigenous cultures around the globe.

Throughout North America native peoples everywhere evince their fascination with, and reverence for, the most prominent celestial bodies. Clark Wissler prefaced his collection of Blackfoot mythology with the following observation:

[8] E. Curr, *The Australian Race, Vol. 1* (Melbourne, 1886), p. 50
[9] H. Cairns, "Aboriginal sky-mapping," in C. Ruggles ed., *Archaeoastronomy in the 1990's* (Leicestershire, 1993), p. 139, quoting Norman Tindale.
[10] B. Maegraith, "The Astronomy of the Aranda and Luritja Tribes," *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 56 (1932), p. 25.

"According to the testimony of many writers, the Blackfoot Indians took great interest in the heavens, and possessed considerable astronomical knowledge. However that may be, this collection contains an unusual number of Star Myths."[11]

What is true in North America is also true of aboriginal cultures in South America. Edmundo Magana emphasized this point in a recent survey:

"Astronomy is of the utmost importance for almost all aspects of life in South American communities."[12]

Among the most popular myths occurring throughout South America is one recounting the sexual misadventures of the planet Venus. Johannes Wilbert summarized the Chorote version as follows:

"Planets appear to be women who, like Morning Star, may descend to earth and become the consorts of men. Venus is the Star Woman who takes pity on a rejected man. She appears in several beautiful text versions of the collection which resemble in form and content the celestial bride tales of other Chaco mythologies, as well as their counterparts in the Ge tradition of eastern Brazil. While associated with her terrestrial companion, the Morning Star of Chorote mythology repeatedly demonstrates her power to destroy human adversaries and their fields."[13]

We will return to this intriguing thematic pattern in chapter six.

That the various cultures of Mesoamerica were obsessed with astronomical matters is well documented. Anthony Aveni described the Maya worldview as follows:

"Ancient Maya notions about the cosmos were quite different from those to which we subscribe today…Sky myths explained the unfolding of history, politics, social relations, and ideas about

[11] C. Wissler & D. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* (Lincoln, 1995), p. 12.
[12] E. Magana, "South American Ethnoastronomy," in *Myth and the Imaginary in the New World* (Laramie, 1986), p. 401.
[13] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chorote Indians* (Los Angeles, 1985), p. 7.

creation and life after death. The Maya forged links between the sky and just about every phase and component of human activity—what we call astrology. And they celebrated this knowledge not only in texts but also in art, architecture, and sculpture."[14]

The Aztecs, like the Maya and Olmec before them, worshipped the planets together with other prominent heavenly bodies. On the primacy of astronomical beliefs in Precolumbian Mesoamerican cultures, Susan Milbrath wrote as follows:

"Astronomy in ancient Mesoamerica was not an abstract science; indeed, it was an integral part of daily life, and so it remains today in the more traditional Maya communities. In Precolumbian times, astronomy played a central role in calendars and religious imagery…Astronomical gods form the core of the Precolumbian Maya pantheon."[15]

Things were little different in pre-colonial Africa. That the ancient Egyptians were avid skywatchers is common knowledge. Virtually every passage in the Pyramid Texts describing the pharaoh's post-mortem ascent to the other world contains a reference to one celestial body or another, various hymns extolling the ancient sun-god, the "Morning Star," and the "Imperishable" Stars (see chapter ten). The texts in question, moreover, date from the very dawn of civilization (ca. 2300 BCE). Witness the following observation of an astronomer who has made a career of analyzing the Egyptian texts:

"There are numerous allusions to astronomy in the lore of ancient Egypt which survive in the monuments and documents handed down to us from Dynastic times…At death, it was the aspiration of every pharaoh to become one with the jΔmw-Ωk, the indestructible polar stars. Almost every aspect of daily life (and death) in ancient Egypt had some connection with astronomy."[16]

A deep and abiding interest in celestial matters is also evident amongst so-called hunter-gatherer cultures. Thus, the Bushman knowledge of the stars was described as follows:

[14] A. Aveni, "Mediators in a Universal Discourse," *Archaeology* 46:4 (July/August, 1993), p. 31.
[15] S. Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya* (Austin, 1999), p. 1.
[16] R.A. Wells, "The Mythology of Nut and the Birth of Ra," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 19 (1992), p. 305.

"The Homeric Greek has not done more towards distinguishing the Stars of the northern hemisphere than have the half-starved outcasts of the Kalahari Desert or the cave-dwellers of the Drakensberg in respect of those spangling our southern skies."[17]

Of the Khoi-Khoi peoples, Tooke wrote as follows:

"From the evidence that remains to us of Hottentot life, we gather that the Hessequa, Cachoqua or Namaqua resembled their pygmy neighbours and foes in taking a lively interest in matters astronomical. Nay more, they regarded some of the heavenly bodies with a veneration approaching worship."[18]

With the decline of the great civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt it was left to the Greeks and Arabs to preserve and disseminate the ancient star lore. Astronomy flourished among the Arabs in the early Middle Ages—it was they who preserved the manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, for example—and vestigial remnants of ancient Babylonian astronomical beliefs often survive in medieval Arabic texts.[19]

Despite abundant and compelling testimony documenting the ancients' preoccupation with celestial matters, it is only in relatively recent times that scholars have begun to seriously explore the astronomical information encoded in ancient myth. It was Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend who, in their combative and controversial *Hamlet's Mill*, argued the case most forcefully:

"The real actors on the stage of the universe are very few, if their adventures are many. The most 'ancient treasure'—in Aristotle's word—that was left to us by our predecessors of the High and Far-Off Times was the idea that the gods are really stars, and that there are no others. The

[17] W. Tooke, "The Star Lore of the South African Natives," *Transactions of the South African Philosophical Society* 5 (1888), p. 304.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 306.
[19] R. Miller, "Pleiades Perceived: Mul.Mul to Subaru," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108.1 (1988), p. 7 notes that Arabic star names "still show not only their Babylonian but also their Sumerian origins and identity, lexically as well as astronomically."

forces reside in the starry heavens, and all the stories, characters and adventures narrated by mythology concentrate on the active powers among the stars, who are the planets."[20]

It is our opinion that the researches of de Santillana and von Dechend are remarkable not only for the wealth of insights unearthed but also for an eccentricity of methodology and argument, the latter of which is all-but-incomprehensible at various points. This eccentricity, together with an unfounded belief in the antiquity of sophisticated astronomical concepts, tended to undermine their general thesis and possible influence.[21] That said, in recent years signs abound that other scholars are arriving at similar judgments with respect to the astronomical determinants of ancient myth and religion. Linda Schele, arguably the most influential Mayanist of the past half-century, wrote as follows regarding the intimate link between Maya astronomy and myth:

"It seems that the interaction of astronomy and mythology was common in other cultures as well [as it was among the Maya]. Scholars working in South America have found similar kinds of systems in the Amazon…The Maya may have been using a way of thinking about the sky and using it in their mythology that was very ancient indeed. I'm even prepared to accept that much of the cosmology/mythology came straight across the Bering Strait, and that it may be 10,000 or 15,000 years old; it may be 20,000 years old. I think it may be possible that we have tapped into a very ancient stratum of human thought. If it did come across with the first Americans, then we may be in touch with one of the two or three great human intellectual traditions that we as a species have ever evolved, part of the fundamental 'software' that all of the peoples of the Americas and Asia have utilized."[22]

Even Claude Lévi-Strauss, a diehard structuralist who emphasized innate properties of the human brain in the genesis (and exegesis) of ancient myth, acknowledged the astronomical content of ancient myth: "Max Müller and his school must be given great credit for having discovered, and to some extent deciphered, the astronomical code so often used by the myths."[23]

[20] *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston, 1969), p. 177.
[21] They argued that much of ancient mythology encoded knowledge of the precession of the equinoxes, for example.
[22] Quoted in R. Wertime & A. Schuster, "Written in the Stars: Celestial Origin of Maya Creation Myth," *Archaeology* 46:4 (July/August, 1993), p. 32.
[23] *Naked Man* (New York, 1981), p. 44.

Granted that astronomical events are encoded in ancient myth, the question arises as to the latter's relevance and reliability for modern science. Can the sacred traditions of ancient skywatchers tell us anything important about the recent history of the solar system? In order to address this question—and also to illustrate the sort of information to be found in native traditions—we propose to examine the sacred lore of the Skidi Pawnee of North America.

A Marriage Made in Heaven

"No other primitive people has such an extensive and accurate record of its myths, tales, and legends as the North American Indian."[24]

How and when the Americas were first settled is lost in the mists of prehistory and remains a matter of controversy and rampant speculation. Whether the earliest inhabitants trekked across the Bering land-bridge which once connected Siberia with western North America, or whether they came in waves by way of boat, will not concern us here. What is certain is that sometime after their arrival from afar, the so-called Indians quickly set about exploring and expanding into the furthest outreaches of North and South America. Some, like those who settled along the Northwest coast of Canada and North America, adopted a relatively sedentary lifestyle marked by fishing and farming. Others, like the Plains Indians, eventually adopted a more nomadic lifestyle, following the buffalo herds wherever they might lead them.

Among the tribes that Lewis and Clark encountered during their famous journey across the heartland of North America was the Skidi Pawnee, who had settled along the Loup river in what is now central Nebraska. The Skidi made their living hunting buffalo, raising corn, and raiding their neighbors.[25]

The Skidi comprise one of the four major bands of the Pawnee and are thought to have immigrated to the Mid-western plains from the South, perhaps preserving religious beliefs otherwise characteristic of the cultures of Mesoamerica and the American Southwest. They speak a Caddoan language.

At the time of their first encounter with Europeans—Spanish and French trappers—the tribe is thought to have numbered around 10,000. Within one century after the visit by Lewis and Clark, the Skidi were reduced to some 600 individuals living on the brink of starvation and extinction.

[24] S. Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Bloomington, 1966), p. xvi.
[25] For a general overview of their history, see B. Pritzker, *A Native American Encyclopedia* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 350-352.

The Skidi were inveterate sky-watchers. Indeed, it has been said that they were "obsessed with the planets"[26] and had "a sky oriented theology perhaps without parallel in human history."[27]

The planet Venus was conceptualized as a Star Woman by the name of *cu-piritta-ka*, which translates literally as "female white star."[28] The anthropologist James Murie, himself of Skidi blood, summarized the lore surrounding this planet as follows:

"The second god Tirawahat placed in the heavens was Evening Star, known to the white people as Venus…She was a beautiful woman. By speaking and waving her hands she could perform wonders. Through this star and Morning Star all things were created. She is the mother of the Skiri [Skidi]. Through her it is possible for people to increase and crops to mature."[29]

It is to be noted that the planet Venus was explicitly distinguished from the "Morning Star." In fact, the Skidi identified the mythical "Morning Star" with the planet Mars, the latter envisaged as a powerful warrior of irascible disposition. Murie offered the following summary of the sacred traditions surrounding the Morning Star:

"The first one he placed in the heavens was Morning Star…This being was to stand on a hot bed of flint. He was to be dressed like a warrior and painted all over with red dust. His head was to be decked with soft down and he was to carry a war club. He was not a chief, but a warrior. He was to follow up all other stars and was to have greater powers than any other god in the heavens. Through him people were to be created and he would demand of the people an offering of a human being. He was to preside over one council of the gods and was to replenish the fire for his brother, Sun. He was also to be the one great power on the east side of the Milky Way. This is Mars, *u-pirikucu?* (literally, 'big star'), or the god of war."[30]

[26] V. Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982), p. 82.
[27] Ibid., p. 29.
[28] J. Murie, "Ceremonies of the Pawnee," *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 39.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 38.

Like numerous other aboriginal cultures, the Skidi traced their origins to events involving the respective planets. The central act of Skidi cosmogony described the Martian warrior's pursuit and eventual conquest of the planet Venus. Creation itself unfolded as a direct result of their sexual union. In summarizing the events in question, Ralph Linton stated simply "The Morning Star married the Evening Star."[31]

The *hieros gamos* between Mars and Venus was ritually reenacted during especially sacred celebrations. On rare occasions, or in the face of some perceived threat—the appearance of a meteor, an epidemic, or some other portent—the Pawnee offered a human sacrifice to the Morning Star, usually in the years when Mars appeared as a morning star.[32] Here a band of warriors would accompany a man impersonating the Morning Star in raiding a neighboring campsite, where they sought to kidnap a young woman of choice. Along the way there was much singing and dancing, during which the heroic deeds of the Martian warrior were recounted and celebrated. Upon capturing a suitable victim, the war party returned to the Skidi village where several months might elapse while the priests prepared for the sacrifice and awaited signs for the most propitious time. The culmination of the rite saw the young woman—representing Venus—being painted head to toe and outfitted with a curious fan-shaped headdress.[33] The victim was then led to a scaffold specially erected for the occasion whereupon, after mounting the final rung, she was shot in the heart by an arrow from the bow of the man impersonating Morning Star. The priests in charge of the gruesome rite took great care to ensure that the girl's blood was directed to a cavity below the scaffold. This pit was lined with white feathers and was held to represent the sacred garden of the planet-goddess: "The pit symbolized the Garden of the Evening Star from which all life originates."[34]

In the Pawnee village, successful completion of the sacrifice was greeted with great rejoicing and a period of "ceremonial sexual license to promote fertility."[35]

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[31] R. Linton, "The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee," *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology* 6 (1923), p. 5
[32] R. Linton, "The Origin of the Skidi Pawnee Sacrifice to the Morning Star," *American Anthropologist* 28 (1928), p. 457. See also the detailed analysis by Von Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982).
[33] See the photo on page 190 of E. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991).
[34] G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 112.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 114.

As bizarre as this rite appears to the modern reader, anthropologists are generally agreed as to its fundamental purpose—to commemorate the sacred events of Creation. Ralph Linton's comments on the ritual are representative in this regard:

"The sacrifice as a whole must be considered as a dramatization of the overcoming of the Evening Star by the Morning Star and their subsequent connection, from which sprang all life on earth. The girl upon the scaffold seems to have been conceived of as a personification or embodiment of the Evening Star surrounded by her powers. When she was overcome, the life of the earth was renewed, insuring universal fertility and increase."[36]

The Skidi traditions with respect to Venus and Mars raise a number of intriguing questions. How are we to explain the origin of such peculiar ideas and practices? The simplest explanation, as well as the most logical, is to trace the respective traditions to objective events involving Venus and Mars. We would thus endorse the opinion expressed by the astronomer Ray Williamson: "The care with which the Pawnee observed the sky and noted the celestial events suggests that the story of Morning Star and Evening Star, in addition to serving as an explanation of the original events of the Pawnee universe, might also reflect actual celestial occurrences."[37]

It was the astronomer Von Del Chamberlain who conducted the most extensive investigation into the historical basis of the Skidi traditions.[38] He, too, concluded that astronomical events inspired the sacred traditions in question: "The conjunctions of Venus and Mars do seem to be the key to the Skidi concept of celestial parentage."[39] As for how these "conjunctions" were to be understood from an astronomical standpoint, Von Del Chamberlain opined that they had reference to Mars' periodic migration from the morning sky to the western evening sky whereupon on very rare occasions it would conjoin with Venus. Other astronomers have since endorsed Chamberlain's interpretation.[40]

[36] R. Linton, "The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee," *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology* 6 (1923), p. 17.
[37] R. Williamson, *Living the Sky* (Norman, 1984), p. 225.
[38] V. Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982).
[39] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[40] E. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991), pp. 189-192.

Granted that "actual celestial occurrences" are encoded in the Skidi myth of Creation, it remains far from obvious how we are to understand the origin of the specific motifs surrounding the respective planets given Von Del Chamberlain's theory. Why was Venus conceptualized as the prototypical female power? Why was Mars viewed as masculine in nature or identified as Morning Star? Why would the periodic, relatively mundane, conjunction of these two particular planets be linked to Creation and ideas of universal fertility? Not one of these questions finds a satisfactory explanation under the thesis advanced by Del Chamberlain.

Perhaps the most important question facing students of ancient myth is the following: Do the Skidi myths with respect to Venus and Mars have an historical or observational basis? Stated another way: Are the sacred traditions in question to be understood as reliable memories of Creation and/or the recent history of the solar system, or are they a product of creative storytelling and thus unique to that particular culture?

It should be pointed out here that, at the time James Murie collected his anthropological reports of the sacred rites in question from old medicine men and other eye-witnesses, the Skidi had been living in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) for over two decades, their previous way of life irreparably interrupted and now only a fond memory. Douglas Parks characterized the degeneration in Skidi culture as follows:

"The changes that occurred [with the move to Indian Territory and abandonment of traditional ways of life] were so basic that they had effectively destroyed the fabric of traditional Pawnee society. In no area of Pawnee life was this more poignantly true than in religion…Thus, when Murie began his work, he was observing a culture that was no longer viable and was only superficially approximating that of the surrounding white population. As time passed even more was irretrievably lost. By the first decade of the 20th century, when Murie's most systematic work was begun, the ceremonial knowledge of the remaining Skiri priests was largely fragmentary. The descriptions that he compiled are based on the memories of the old surviving priests, and are, as a consequence, uneven in quality. Other factors, such as the reluctance of some individuals to divulge their knowledge, undoubtedly contribute to this unevenness. In spite

of the problems, however, Murie obtained an overview of the Skiri ceremonial calendar and filled out many parts of this scheme with an admirable amount of detail."[41]

In light of this history, it is to be expected that the fragmentary traditions preserved by the Skidi informants might well have suffered disjuncture in certain respects. Yet as we will document, there is much reason to believe that the Skidi traditions with respect to Venus and Mars preserve an accurate memory of extraordinary events of earthshaking import. But how do we go about establishing this point?

In order to determine whether the Skidi astral traditions have an observational basis and thus represent archaic conceptions regarding the various planets, it is instructive to perform a cross-cultural analysis of astral lore. If the Skidi traditions have a rational foundation in actual historical events, they must find corroboration elsewhere. If, on the other hand, they are to be understood as fictional in nature or of relatively recent origin, it stands to reason that it would be most unlikely that cultures from the Old World would relate similar stories about the respective planets (that is, of course, unless they were directly influenced by Skidi beliefs). Yet if such cultures preserved myths and rites analogous to those from aboriginal North America, a *prima facie* case is thereby made for the thesis defended here, which holds that the Amerindian mythological traditions surrounding Venus and Mars encode and describe observed astronomical events.

The astronomical lore from ancient Mesopotamia offers a perfect case study in this regard inasmuch as it constitutes the earliest and most extensive body of traditions about the respective planets.

[41] D. Parks, "Ceremonies of the Pawnee," in D. Parks ed., *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (1981), p. 18.

Inanna: Queen of Heaven

"If we survey the whole of the evidence on this subject…we may conclude that a great Mother Goddess, the personification of all the reproductive energies of nature, was worshipped under different names but with a substantial similarity of myth and ritual by many peoples of Western Asia; that associated with her was a lover, or rather series of lovers, divine yet mortal, with whom she mated year by year, their commerce being deemed essential to the propagation of animals and plants, each in their several kind; and further, that the fabulous union of the divine pair was simulated and, as it were, multiplied on earth by the real, though temporary, union of the human sexes at the sanctuary of the goddess for the sake of thereby ensuring the fruitfulness of the ground and the increase of man and beast."[42]

The science of astronomy owes its origin to skywatchers and diviners in ancient Mesopotamia, and thus the practice of observing the respective planets had a long history in that region. What, then, do we know about the mythological traditions surrounding Venus and Mars in the ancient Near East?

Veneration of the planet Venus under the guise of the goddess Inanna is ubiquitous in the earliest temples yet excavated in Mesopotamia.[43] At Uruk, the oldest urban site in the entire Near East, offerings to Inanna/Venus far outnumber those of any other deity.[44] In strata conventionally dated to ca. 3000 BCE (Uruk IV-III), Inanna is already associated with various symbols that would become conspicuous in her later cult (the eight-pointed star and rosette, for example).

The Sumerian cult of Inanna, upon being assimilated with that of the Semitic goddess Ishtar, would dominate the religious landscape of Mesopotamia for over two thousand years. As our earliest historical testimony documenting the worship of the planet Venus, the literature surrounding Inanna must figure prominently in any discussion of astral myth.

[42] J. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* (New Hyde Park, 1961), p. 39.
[43] According to Wolfgang Heimpel, "A Catalog of Near Eastern Venus Deities," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4:3 (1982), p. 12 the identification of Inanna and Venus was first made in prehistoric times and is apparent "in all historical periods."
[44] K. Szarzynska, "Offerings for the goddess Inana," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 87 (1993), p. 7

Writing first developed in Sumer during the period known as Uruk IV/III, later spreading to Egypt. Inanna's name was originally written with a pictograph transcribed as MUÍ$_3$, thought to depict a pole-like standard with reed stalks bound together in volutes. In the earliest period (Uruk IV), the sign typically appears without the divine determinative, although exceptions do occur. In the subsequent period, the MUÍ$_3$-sign is usually preceded by a divine determinative—a star-like object closely resembling a modern asterisk. Inasmuch as the pictographic determinative for "god" features an eight-pointed star, it stands to reason that Inanna was already identified with a celestial body during the archaic Uruk period. Krystyna Szarzynska, the leading authority on the archaic Uruk script, has expressed a similar view: "In the most archaic period the determinative dingir was associated with astral deities only.[45]

A number of hymns celebrating Inanna were composed during the Akkadian dynasty of Sargon (ca. 2300 BCE). As scholars have pointed out, it is probable that this sacred literature includes some very ancient ideas, perhaps reflecting "archaic Sumerian tradition."[46]

The corpus of hymns allegedly composed by Enheduanna, a daughter of Sargon himself, is representative of this period and literary genre. The hymn nin-me-ßar-ra, generally known as "The Exaltation of Inanna," rarely mentions the goddess by name; rather, Inanna is invoked through a series of epithets such as "great queen of queens"[47] or "hierodule of An."[48] As the planet Venus, Inanna is celebrated as "senior queen of the heavenly foundations and zenith."[49] In that hymn, as elsewhere, Inanna personifies Venus as the "beloved bride" of Dumuzi.[50]

Inanna's prowess as a warrior is a recurring point of emphasis in the Sumerian texts. The hymn in-nin me-huß-a, otherwise known as *Inanna and Ebih*, celebrates the goddess as follows:

[45] Personal communication, March 22, 1997. It is Szarzynska's opinion that the veneration of astral deities reaches back to the proto-Sumerian period, perhaps earlier.
[46] K. Szarzynska, *Sumerica* (Warsaw, 1997), p. 148.
[47] See W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), p. 23. As the authors point out, p. 53, this epithet parallels a common epithet of Inanna/Ishtar in Akkadian times (*belit beleti*).
[48] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 29.

"Great queen Inanna, expert at fomenting wars, destroyer of the enemy country…like a lion you have filled heaven and earth with your roaring, and you have made the people quake."[51]

Inanna's warrior-aspect forms a prominent theme in the hymn known as in-nin ßa-gur-ra, also attributed to Enheduanna. Inanna is described therein as a terrifying warrior "clothed in awe-inspiring radiance," whose wrath unleashes a powerful flood which brings widespread destruction.[52] In fact, the goddess's path of destruction is said to extend "from the sunrise to the sunset."[53] A recurring epithet of the planet-goddess in these early texts—*an al-dúb-ba ki sìg-ga*, "[she] who shakes the sky and makes the earth tremble"[54]—emphasizes her destructive nature.

In another passage from the same hymn the warrior-goddess is represented as threatening the gods in heaven:

"She is a huge neckstock clamping down on the gods of the land, Her radiance covers the great mountain, silences the road, The gods of the land are panic-stricken by her heavy roar, At her uproar the Anunna-gods tremble like a solitary reed, At her shrieking they hide all together."[55]

Significantly, the warrior-goddess is said to come "from the sky":

"Inanna, your triumph is terrible…[break in text] The Anunna-gods bow down their nose, they hurl themselves to the ground…you come *from* heaven."[56]

In these early hymns Inanna/Venus is depicted as an awe-inspiring numinous power, to be feared as well as propitiated. The following passage is representative in this regard: "To provoke shivers of fright, panic, trembling, and terror before the halo of your fearsome splendor, that is in your nature, oh Inanna!"[57]

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[51] *Ebih* 5-9.
[52] A. Sjöberg, "in-nin ßà-gur$_4$-ra. A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna…," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1976), p. 181.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 179.
[56] *Ibid*., pp. 188-189. Italics in the original translation by Sjöberg.
[57] F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 118. Translation of the French text by Birgit Liesching.

The Sacred Marriage Rite

"The Babylonian paradigm for love and marriage was the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi."[58]

One of the most important celebrations in ancient Mesopotamia was the so-called sacred marriage rite, alleged to commemorate the sexual union of Inanna with Dumuzi.[59] Early texts confirm that the performance was believed to stimulate the growth of crops. Of untold antiquity—a vase recovered from the Protoliterate period at Uruk (ca. late 4th millennium BCE) is thought to depict the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi[60]—the ritual appears to have died out after the Old Babylonian period.[61]

In the rite in question a "flowered bed" or "garden" would be prepared, whereupon the king would have intercourse with a woman representing Inanna.[62] Douglas Frayne offered the following summary of the rite:

"It is clear that the central purpose of the Sacred Marriage Rite was to promote fertility in the land. The rationale of the ceremony was that by a kind of sympathetic act involving the sexual union of the king, playing the role of the *en* [typically personifying Dumuzi] with a woman, generally referred to simply as Inanna, the crops would come up abundantly and both the animal and human populations would have the desire and fertility to ensure that they would multiply."[63]

[58] W. Heimpel, "Mythologie, A. I," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol. 8* (Berlin, 1993-1997), p. 547.
[59] E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia: Part I," *Orientalia* 13 (1944), p. 1 states that "the very ancient rite of the sacred marriage was of the utmost importance, if not the essential and pivotal element of Babylonian religion."
[60] H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954), pp. 25-27. See also T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), p. 209; G. Selz, "Five Divine Ladies," *NIN* 1 (2000), p. 31.
[61] R. Kutscher, "The Cult of Dumuzi/Tammuz," in J. Klein ed., *Bar-Ilan Studies in Assyriology* (New York, 1990), p. 41. Although references to a sacred marriage rite are to be found in the letters of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, human beings no longer take an active role in consummating the marriage of the goddess and her consort. See also D. Frayne, "Notes on The Sacred Marriage Rite," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 42:1/2 (1985), cols. 11, 22.
[62] See here the discussion in D. Frayne, *op. cit*., cols. 14, 21.
[63] *Ibid*., col. 6.

Our most important source describing the rite is the marriage hymn of Iddin-Dagan, the third king of the First Dynasty of Isin (ca. 1974-1954 BCE). The text begins by invoking Inanna as the planet Venus. Excerpts from the hymn follow:

"I shall greet her who descends from above…I shall greet the great lady of heaven, Inana! I shall greet the holy torch who fills the heavens, the light, Inana, her who shines like the daylight, the great lady of heaven, Inana! I shall greet the Mistress, the most awesome lady among the Anuna gods; the respected one who fills heaven and earth with her huge brilliance…Her descending is that of a warrior."[64]

Here, as so often in Sumerian literature, Inanna is compared to a shining torch whose "huge" brilliance is said to "fill heaven" and shine like the daylight, images that are extremely difficult to reconcile with Venus's present modest luster.

In the ensuing lines of the hymn there are allusions to various offerings given to Inanna. After the goddess bathes herself, a bed is set up for her and the king to share. Properly prepared, the king—in the guise of Dumuzi—approaches the bed:

"On New Year's day, the day of ritual, They set up a bed for my lady. They cleanse rushes with sweet-smelling cedar oil, They arrange them (the rushes) for my lady, for their (Inanna and the king) bed…My lady bathes (her) pure lap, She bathes for the lap of the king…The king approaches (her) pure lap proudly, Ama'ußumgalanna lies down beside her, He caresses her pure lap…She makes love with him on her bed, (She says) to Iddin-Dagan: 'You are surely my beloved.'…The palace is festive, the king is joyous, The people spend the day in plenty. Ama'ußumgalanna stands in great joy. May he spend long life on the radiant throne!"[65]

Ama'ußumgalanna here is simply an epithet of Dumuzi, the paramour of the planet-goddess Inanna.

[64] Lines 1-18 as quoted from "A *ßir-namursaga* to Inana for Iddin-Dagan," in J. Black et al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford, 2004), p. 263. See also D. Reisman, "Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 25 (1973), pp. 186-191.
[65] D. Reisman, *op. cit*., pp. 190-191.

In ancient Mesopotamia, as elsewhere, the ritual *hieros gamos* formed a prominent feature of the New Year's celebrations. By all accounts it was a particularly joyous occasion, marked by a period of feasting and revelry following consummation of the royal marriage:

"The glad news of the successful accomplishment of the long rite having been communicated to the people who had been waiting in anxious expectation to learn the issue, there was an outburst of exultation and thanksgiving, followed by a great feast of which all partook, the newly-wedded pair, the visiting divinities, the whole multitude who, in gratitude for the fertility which was now assured, raised jubilant hymns to the sound of the lyre, flutes and drums."[66]

Even from this brief summary it must be admitted that the Sumerian beliefs surrounding Inanna/Venus offer striking parallels to the Skidi traditions describing Venus. In addition to embodying the female principle, the planet is assigned a central role in a sacred *hieros gamos* thought to promote the fertility of the land.

The concordance between the Sumerian and Skidi traditions extends to the finest details. As the Skidi Venus was represented as a warrior-goddess threatening to throw the world into permanent darkness so, too, was Inanna/Venus invoked as an inveterate warmonger capable of turning light into darkness. Thus, an early hymn invokes Inanna as follows: "On the wide and silent plain, darkening the bright daylight, she turns midday into darkness."[67]

Modern scholars have generally sought to divorce Inanna's warrior-aspect from her identification with Venus, and thus one finds frequent reference to a "conflation" of originally separate traditions.[68] Yet no matter how incongruous the image of a warring Venus might appear to the arm-chair theorist enthralled by the central dogma of modern astronomy—i.e., that the

[66] E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia," *Orientalia* 13 (1944), p. 34.
[67] Line 49 of "A Hymn to Inana," as quoted in J. Black et al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford, 2004), p. 94.
[68] T. Jacobsen, "Mesopotamian Religion: An Overview," in M. Eliade ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), p. 459 claims that the various aspects of the goddess "show little unity or coherent pattern," a circumstance which he would attribute to the "syncretistic image of Inanna." See also Gebhard Selz, "Five Divine Ladies," *NIN* 1 (2000), p. 34, who writes: "It follows, that we have good reasons to doubt that the Sumerian Inana(k) was ever a proper war-goddess."

planets have forever moved peacefully on their present orbits— Inanna's destructive demeanor is inherent in her archetypal manifestation as the planet Venus. This is stated explicitly in Iddin-Dagan's sacred marriage hymn, as elsewhere:

"As the lady, admired by the Land, the lone star, the Venus star, the lady elevated as high as the heaven, descends from above like a warrior, all the lands tremble before her."[69]

The life-giving garden associated with the Skidi planet-goddess also finds a symbolic counterpart in Sumerian tradition. Thus a garden of Inanna/Venus is mentioned in conjunction with the sacred marriage rite:

"A garden of the goddess ($kiri_6$-nin-ku_3-nun-na) is attested in the oldest extant ritual text…According to lines 9-11 of this ritual the king is to bathe in the garden on the night of the fourth day of the ritual."[70]

The king himself, in accordance with this symbolism, was compared to a "gardener" while impersonating Dumuzi:

"Deified kings who enacted the role of the bridegroom were said to be placed 'in the holy garden'. By analogous symbolism the divine bride was compared to a green garden."[71]

As the Skidi held that "all life" originated from Venus's sacred garden so, too, did the Sumerians deem the planet Venus to be the "divine source of all life."[72] This is but one of hundreds of archetypal motifs associated with Venus that will never be explained by reference to the planet familiar to modern astronomers.

[69] Lines 135ff. as quoted in J. Black et al., *op. cit*., p. 266.
[70] M. Hall, *A Study of the Sumerian Moon-God, Nanna/Suen* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 750-751. This is a dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania.
[71] E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia," *op. cit*., p. 31.
[72] F. Bruschweiler, *op. cit*., p. 112. See also the discussion in B. Hrußka, "Das spätbabylonische Lehrgedict 'Inanna's Erhöhung'," *Archiv Orientalni* 37 (1969), p. 482: "In der sumerischen Zeile wird ^{d}ißtar-kakkabi mit dem Namen ti-mú-a 'Leben erzeugende' wiedergegeben."

The most comprehensive study of the sacred marriage rite in ancient Mesopotamia is that by Pirjo Lapinkivi. She poses the following question:

"The language of most of the sacred marriage texts is so explicitly sexual that it seems beyond question that they describe a sexual union between the king and the goddess Inanna, the consummation of their marriage. The crucial question, however, is, *why*? Why did this union take place, and why was it performed ritually…?"[73]

Lapinkivi then proceeds to answer her own question—the historical origin and fundamental purpose of the sacred marriage rite remains unknown:

"Despite all the various suggestions reviewed above, no scholarly consensus has been reached regarding this basic question. While the importance of the sacred marriage for the Sumerians is obvious, it has remained enigmatic to the modern scholars."[74]

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand why scholars have failed to discern the original significance of the sacred marriage rite: They have all but ignored the formative influence of planets in the genesis of ancient myth and religion. Thus it is that the all-important role of the planet Venus in the sacred marriage rite has been essentially overlooked. The fact that most scholars have eschewed a comparative approach has also proven myopic and prevented them from discovering that analogous traditions surround Venus in other cultures.

Surveying the sacred lore surrounding Inanna prompts a host of questions: To what extent does it reflect ancient conceptions involving the planet Venus? Why would the early kings of Mesopotamia seek legitimization for their rule through a symbolic marriage with the planet Venus, the latter personified by Inanna? How are we to understand the curious belief maintaining that the king's sexual union with Inanna/Venus would promote fertility and abundance throughout the land? Why is the planet Venus involved in a "sacred marriage" at all, much less one with a supposedly mortal king like Dumuzi? And if Inanna is to be identified with

[73] P. Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage* (Helsinki, 2004), p. 14.
[74] *Ibid*., p. 14.

the planet Venus, how are we to understand her mortal paramour Dumuzi? Was he, too, originally a celestial body and, if so, which one? Although such questions cry out for explanation, it must be said that few scholars have sought to address them in any sort of systematic fashion.

Dumuzi in the Sky with Diamonds

"The centre of interest is no longer what the deity Tammuz 'represents'; indeed, there is no longer, in origin, even a deity. There is strong evidence that Dumuzi was originally a man, a king of Erech, who may have lived, like the other great characters of Sumerian legend, Gilgamesh, Lugalbanda and Enmerkar, during the particular stage of Sumerian history known as the Early Dynastic Period."[75]

One of the most perplexing questions confronting students of ancient myth is who, or what, was Dumuzi? Bendt Alster underscored the mystery surrounding the god: "A considerable number of attempts have been made to define the character of the god, but the results so far have failed to carry conviction."[76]

According to conventional opinion, Dumuzi was an early Sumerian king whose singular accomplishments inspired the creation of a mythological character whose tragic fate was eulogized and lamented throughout the ancient Near East. This interpretation has been defended by the likes of Adam Falkenstein,[77] Otto Gurney,[78] Jeffrey Tigay, and Wolfgang Heimpel.[79]

It is our contention that such opinions represent the height of folly and serve to illustrate the intellectual inertia induced by the modern penchant for ever-increasing specialization. Archetypal myths, of which Dumuzi's marriage with Inanna is a classic example, *never* have reference to mere mortals of flesh and blood. Rather, as we intend to document, such myths *always* have reference to divine (i.e., celestial) agents and extraordinary events witnessed at a particular point in time.

It was Bendt Alster who came the closest to solving the puzzle of Dumuzi's origins. With specific reference to the god's role in the sacred marriage rite, Alster suggested that a celestial

[75] O. Gurney, "Tammuz Reconsidered," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962), p. 150.
[76] B. Alster, *Dumuzi's Dream* (Copenhagen, 1972), p. 9.
[77] A. Falkenstein, "Tammuz," *Compte rendu, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* 3 (1954), pp. 41-65.
[78] O. Gurney, *op. cit*., p. 150, writes "There is strong evidence that Dumuzi was originally a man, a king of Erech."
[79] W. Heimpel, "Mythologie, A. I," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol. 8* (Berlin, 1993-1997), p. 548.

prototype had most likely inspired the myth: "The conclusion would be that that ruler on earth who represents Dumuzi in the sacred marriage also receives his paradigmatic function from a celestial body."[80] Alster went on to speculate that the star in question was to be identified with either Sirius or Orion.[81]

Lapinkivi likewise looked to the stars in order to explain Dumuzi's role in the sacred marriage rite. Logically enough, Lapinkivi deduced that Dumuzi's union with Inanna/Venus implied an ascent to heaven, a conclusion otherwise supported by his proverbial role as the "gatekeeper" of heaven:

"Since Inanna was a heavenly goddess, her marriage was most likely conceived as occurring in heaven. If the wedding took place in heaven, Dumuzi must have returned there. This is also indicated in those Dumuzi-Inanna songs where Dumuzi is described as standing at Ningal's gate (DI H, the *Manchester Tammuz*), obviously pointing at Inanna's home in heaven. The same view is confirmed in *Adapa and the South Wind*."[82]

That Dumuzi represented a celestial body is well attested, although this evidence has consistently been downplayed in scholarly analyses of his role in ancient religion. Samuel Kramer published an early hymn (BM 88318) in which Dumuzi was translated to heaven at the behest of Inanna, wherein he became stationed as a star or planet.[83] In the text in question a strange illness overtakes Dumuzi after having intercourse with Inanna in his garden, at which point Inanna offers a plea to Ninegal, the queen of the netherworld:

[80] B. Alster, "The Paradigmatic Character of Mesopotamian Heroes," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 68 (1974), p. 54.
[81] Of the astral interpretation of Dumuzi favored by such earlier scholars as Thureau-Dangin, Alster, *op. cit*, p. 54 wrote: "This very justified conception of Dumuzi, which fits also with the earliest Sumerian sources, was later totally abandoned by scholars, who instead viewed him as an originally 'historical person', the 'power in the date palm', the 'power in grain and beer', or the 'power in milk'."
[82] P. Lapinkivi, *op. cit*., p. 151.
[83] S. Kramer, "BM 88318: The Ascension of Dumuzi to Heaven," *Recueil de travaux et communications de l'Association des Études du Proche-Orient Ancien* 2 (1984), pp. 5-9.

"Oh Ninegal, let not the sick one die. The wild ox has directed the boat, the possessions-(loaded) boat, The wild ox Dumuzi (has directed the boat)…Oh Maid, station him for me at the sky, Station for me at the sky the greatest of wild oxen, Station Dumuzi for me at the sky."[84]

In his commentary on this short and admittedly obscure text, Kramer speculated as to the antiquity and theological significance of Dumuzi's catasterization: "Since, as is well-known, the king of Sumer, as the husband of Inanna, was identified with Amaußumgalanna, it may be, to judge from this hymn, that there was current in Sumer a theological tenet that the king upon his death was turned into a heavenly star situated close to the Venus-star Inanna."[85]

As we will discover in the chapters to follow, there are good grounds for believing that Kramer's deduction was right on the money.

An Old Babylonian hymn known as BM 96739 also serves to confirm the celestial context of the sacred marriage rite. There Dumuzi appears as a champion of the gods—a veritable Sumerian Heracles—sallying forth to wage war against the terrifying Kur, the latter personifying the rebellious forces of chaos associated with the Cosmic Mountain. Excerpts from the hymn follow:

"Oh Inanna, a husband worthy of your splendor has been granted to you…You, oh mistress, you have handed over to him your power as is due to a king, and Ama-ušumgal-anna causes a radiant brilliance to burst out for you; oh Inanna, you have handed over to him your power as is due to a king and Ama-ušumgal-anna causes a radiant brilliance to burst out for you; when he goes forth against the rebel, the far-away k u r he spends his time in destructive whirlwinds; when Ama-ušumgal-anna goes forth against the far-away k u r, he spends his time in destructive whirlwinds, like Utu when he comes out of the k u r of the perfumed cedars, (shining) with good grease, he takes on enormous proportions, like Utu when he comes out of the k u r of the perfumed cedars, Ama-ušumgal-anna (shining) with good grease, he takes on enormous

[84] *Ibid*., p. 6.
[85] Quoted in D. Foxvog, "Astral Dumuzi," in M. Cohen et al eds., *The Tablet and the Scroll* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 105.

proportions!"[86] Note: This passage is rendered as follows by Black: "Ama-usum-gal-ana thickens good butter for you, as Utu rises from the fragrant cedar mountains."[87]

In this passage Dumuzi, as Ama-ušumgal-anna, is described as a celestial power, as a brilliantly shining "star" akin to the ancient sun-god Utu.[88] The translators of the hymn in question—Adam Falkenstein and Wolfram von Soden—deemed Dumuzi a "kriegerische Gestirnsgottheit."[89] Daniel Foxvog, in his commentary on BM 96739, called it "remarkable" and "unusual" for "its martial portrayal of Dumuzi, in his aspect of Amaußumgalanna, the royal consort of the goddess in the Sacred Marriage Rite, and for the astral references found throughout."[90]

As for which celestial body served as the prototype for Dumuzi the evidence of comparative mythology leaves little room for doubt: It was the planet Mars, as Nergal, that was identified as the "warrior-star" in Babylonian astronomical lore.[91] And it was the red planet that served as the prototypical masculine agent in the *hieros gamos* as we have learned from our analysis of Skidi Pawnee traditions. The same planet was also identified as the "gatekeeper" of heaven in ancient Ugarit (see chapter eleven).[92] In fact, everything we know about Dumuzi is consistent with his identification with Mars. That being the case, and because the figure of Nergal will feature prominently as a recurring point of comparison throughout this book, a brief overview of his cult is in order as a prelude for the chapters to follow.

[86] Quoted from F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 110.
[87] Line 28 in "A Tigi to Inana (Inana E)," ETCSL.
[88] It is to be noted that the name Amaußumgalanna itself suggests a celestial power. According to B. Alster, "Tammuz," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1572 the name means "The Lord (is a) Great Dragon of Heaven." Alster also cites the god's variant name Ama-ushum-an, "Ama-ushum of Heaven."
[89] A. Falkenstein & W. von Soden, *Sumerische und Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Stuttgart, 1953), p. 364.
[90] D. Foxvog, *op. cit*., p. 103.
[91] M. Jastrow, *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria* (New York, 1910), p. 108. See also E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 15-26.
[92] J. Sawyer & F. Stephenson, "Literary and Astronomical Evidence for a Total Eclipse of the Sun Observed in Ancient Ugarit on 3 May 1375 B.C.," *BSOAS* 33 (1970), pp. 467-489. On Dumuzi's status as gatekeeper of Anu, see Lines 49 and 56 of Adapa.

Nergal

Nergal is best known by virtue of his mention in the Old Testament, wherein he appears as an angel of destruction.[93] The chief god of Kutha, a city in ancient Babylonia, Nergal's cult can be traced throughout the wide range of Akkadian influence, from Mari to Babylon.[94] First attested in inscriptions of Naram Sin (ca. 2300 BCE), the cult of Nergal would still claim adherents some three thousand years later.[95]

Nergal is identified with the planet Mars already in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000 BCE), and thus it is that the Sumero-Babylonian cult of Nergal offers us the earliest testimony we have regarding ancient conceptions of the red planet.[96] The following hymn from Uruk captures the essence of the god:

"[O Nergal], warrior of the gods, who possesses the lofty strength of Anu, [Lion] with gaping maw, marauding lion monster, who takes his place nobly in the height of heaven, [Who holds] lordship, whose features ever glow in heaven…[O Nergal, warrior] of the gods, long of arms, whose divine splendor is sublime in heaven, [Star] ever shining, sublime of features."[97]

Here, as elsewhere, Nergal is renowned for his prodigious strength. Indeed, the epithet *dandanni ilani* characterizes him as the "strongest" of the gods.[98]

[93] *II Kings* 17:30. J. Curtis, "An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957), pp. 137-177. See also S.A. Meier, "Destroyer," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 456-463.
[94] E. Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 25, 37.
[95] *Ibid*., pp. 35, 104.
[96] *Ibid*., p. 76.
[97] B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 626.
[98] J. Böllenrücher, *Gebete und Hymnen an Nergal* (Leipzig, 1904), p. 7.

Nergal was especially celebrated as a raging warrior, the god's name serving as a synonym for war.[99] Various hymns attest to the god's capacity for destruction. The following hymn is representative in this regard:

"Warrior! Raging storm-tide, who flattens the lands in upheaval, Warrior! Lord of the Underworld…Raging storm-tide, who has no rival, Who wields the weapon, who raises the troops."[100]

Inscriptions of Naram-Sin, Hammurabi, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal invoke the god's aid in battle. A passage from the epilogue of Hammurabi's Law Code compares Nergal to a "raging fire": "May Nergal, the strong one among the gods, the fighter without peer, who achieves victory for me, burn his [i.e., the enemy's] people in his great power, like the raging fire of swamp-reeds!"[101]

Nergal's bellicosity knew no bounds, extending to the domain of the gods as well:

"O warrior, splendid one…Mighty of arms, broad of chest, perfect one without rival among all the gods, Who grasps the pitiless deluge-weapon, who massacres the enemy, Lion clad in splendor, at the flaring-up of whose fierce brilliance, The gods of the inhabited world took to secret places…"[102]

Nergal was early on associated with the Netherworld, as witnessed by the epithet umun-úrugal, "Lord of the Netherworld."[103] An Assyrian text entitled *Nergal and Ereshkigal* tells of Nergal's usurpation of the throne of the underworld at the expense of Ereshkigal.[104]

In addition to his warrior and chthonic aspects, there is unequivocal evidence that Nergal was intimately linked with fertility and vegetation. He was known as "Lord of the Green," for

[99] *Ibid*., p. 70.
[100] J. Curtis, *op. cit*., p. 156.
[101] W. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Reßep* (New Haven, 1976), p. 37.
[102] B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 622.
[103] D. Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 404.
[104] For a discussion of this document see O. Gurney & J. Finkelstein, *The Sultantepe Tablets* (London, 1957).

example.[105] The epithets "lord of abundance"[106] and he who "increases the green"[107] point in the same general direction.

In ancient Assyria Nergal was represented as a dying god who was subsequently resurrected. And, as was the case with Dumuzi, mourning rites commemorated Nergal's "death."[108] Mark Cohen summarized the evidence on this ritual as follows:

"According to the Assyrian Astrolabe B the month of Kissilimu was known as the month of Nergal: 'The month Kissilimu, an abundant yield will be heaped up, the mighty hero, Nergal who has arisen from the netherworld, the overwhelming weapon of the two gods, the month of the hero, the noble Nergal.' The Nimrud incantation reiterates this as being the month of Nergal: 'May the month Kissilimu, of the great warrior Nergal, absolve!'"[109]

Otto Gurney, in his discussion of Dumuzi's cult, observed that Nergal's cult represented "perhaps the best evidence for a seasonal resurrection."[110] Rather than pursue this possible lead, however, Gurney denied that Nergal had any relation to fertility and thus ruled out any connection between Nergal/Mars and the myth of Dumuzi: "But Nergal was not a fertility god, and the allusion must rather be to the victory of the sun after the winter solstice."[111]

Gurney's denial notwithstanding, Nergal *was* intimately associated with fertility and vegetation. Indeed, the statement in the Assyrian inscription that "abundance" will be heaped up with Nergal's resurrection suffices to reinforce the connection and recalls the intimate association between Dumuzi and the luxuriant growth of vegetation.

Armed with this evidence, it is instructive to compare the mythical careers of the two gods. The image of Dumuzi as a warrior-star raging against the rebel lands finds a close parallel in the

[105] W. Lambert, "Lugalsig'a," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol. 7* (Berlin, 1993-1997), p. 151.
[106] Line 52 in J. Black et al., "A tigi to Nergal (Nergal C)," *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/) (Oxford, 1998-), hereafter ETCSL.
[107] J. Curtis, *op. cit*., p. 155.
[108] M. Cohen, *Sumerian Hymnology: The Erßemma* (Cincinnati, 1981), pp. 92-95.
[109] M. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 334.
[110] O. Gurney, "Tammuz Reconsidered," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962), p. 158.
[111] *Ibid*.

sacred traditions surrounding Nergal. Like Dumuzi, Nergal is celebrated for waging combat against the powers of chaos:

"As you rise up in frightening sheen, …with your kingship you inspire terrifying fear. Hero with your magnificent strength…you pile up the rebel lands in heaps."[112]

As a weapon Nergal is said to have wielded the brilliantly shining *ßita*-mace. Witness the following hymn:

"Nergal, lofty hero, who has power and fearsomeness, who holds the terrible Íita-weapon."[113]

Significantly, in the aforementioned Old Babylonian hymn the warrior-star Dumuzi is said to employ this very weapon in defense of Inanna. Witness the following passage: "For you Ama-ußumgal-ana, the mighty hero, kills everyone with his shining ßita mace."[114]

Most telling, perhaps, is the fact that Dumuzi is said to have swollen to enormous proportions during his onslaught against the rebel lands: "he takes on enormous proportions!"[115] The Sumerian expression in question is *peß-peß*, signifying a prodigious "enlargement" of form.[116] According to Françoise Bruschweiler, the comparison is intended to emphasize Dumuzi's larger-than-life form as he warred against the Kur.[117] Yet as we have documented elsewhere, the swelling of the Martian warrior constitutes an archetypal mythological motif and is best interpreted as having reference to the primeval appearance of the planet Mars, which once swelled to a terrifyingly massive form as it moved ominously close to Earth.[118] Nergal himself is described with the epithet *peß-gal*, formed from the very same verb as that chosen to describe

[112] Lines 53ff in J. Black et al, "A tigi to Nergal (Nergal C)," *ETCSL*.
[113] E. von Weiher, *op. cit*., p. 29. The phrase in question reads as follows: "Nergal, hoher Herr, der Kraft und Schrecken hat, der zur schrecklichen Íita(-Waffe) gegriffen hat."
[114] Line 33 as translated by J. Black et al, "A tigi to Inana (Inana E)," *ETCSL*.
[115] Quoted from F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 110.
[116] *Ibid*., p. 111.
[117] *Ibid*.
[118] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 149-158.

Dumuzi's swelling, the word *gal* ("great") serving to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the swelling in question.[119]

At this point it should be obvious that the thesis defended here stands in stark contrast to the conventional view. This is best illustrated, perhaps, by comparing our view with that advanced by Thorkild Jacobsen, the recently deceased dean of Sumerian studies, who consistently ignored the explicit celestial context of the sacred traditions surrounding Dumuzi and Inanna while seeking an explanation of their *hieros gamos* in the mundane aspects of daily life in ancient Mesopotamia. Jacobsen would understand Inanna as originally signifying the numen of the date storehouse.[120] Dumuzi-Amaushumgalanna he deemed to be "the power in the date palm to produce new fruit."[121] Jacobsen summarized Dumuzi's original character as follows:

"The bridegroom, Amaushumgalanna, represents what is to be stored in the storehouse…He is the personified power in the one enormous bud which the date palm sprouts each year, and from which issue the new leaves, flowers, and fruits. Dumuzi-Amaushumgalanna is thus a personification of the power behind the yearly burgeoning of the palm and its producing its yield of dates; he is, in fact, the power in and behind the date harvest. That these two powers are wed means that the power for fertility and yield has been captured by the numen of the storehouse—and so by the community—and has become its trusty provider for all time."[122]

The sacred marriage between Dumuzi and Inanna, in accordance with these premises, is to be understood as reflecting the date harvest's placement in the storehouse. Hence the rationale behind Jacobsen's interpretation of the ritual's symbolism: "For the success of their union means that Inanna, the storehouse, can 'take care of the life of all lands.'"[123]

[119] E. von Weiher, *op. cit*., p. 61.
[120] T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), p. 135.
[121] *Ibid*., p. 26. Jeremy Black, "The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon," *Religion* 11 (1981), p. 51 claims that Dumuzi "personified the power in the sap of trees and plants, especially the date-palm, and the power in milk (hence his title the Shepherd)."
[122] T. Jacobsen, *op. cit*., p. 36.
[123] *Ibid*., p. 39.

I'll leave it for readers to decide which interpretation—that of Thorkild Jacobsen or that offered here—best accounts for the data at hand. Does an enormous date bud, or an enormous planet, best describe the beloved hero known as Dumuzi? Does a crop of dates sitting inertly within the storehouse, or a spectacular conjunction of planets in the midst of cosmic upheaval, best explain the multivalent symbolism surrounding the *hieros gamos* between Dumuzi and Inanna?

Interlude

"A rite which originated in prehistoric times, and was maintained with only temporary lapses throughout three millennia, could not fail to have a profound influence on religious belief. In the course of centuries the rite was purged of its grosser details until there remained only those spiritual elements which composed the basic conception of the great drama of the sacred marriage."[124]

In aboriginal North America, as in ancient Mesopotamia, the planet Venus plays a central role in myths recounting Creation. This surprising concordance in worldview demands an explanation. What is there about the appearance or recent history of Venus and Mars that would warrant their apparent prominence in sacred myths of cosmogony?

In order to answer this question, it is essential to understand that Creation myths have nothing whatsoever to do with the origin of the universe per se, as in the modern theory of the Big Bang. Rather, such myths have reference to prehistoric catastrophic events as witnessed and experienced by human beings around the globe. The events in question were so spectacular and life-altering that they were understood as divinely inspired and thus deemed sacred and paradigmatic for the origin of the major institutions of culture itself (marriage, kingship, funerary practices, etc). It is Mircea Eliade who has offered the most insightful analysis of myth's determinative role in ancient cultures:

"One fact strikes us immediately: in such societies the myth is thought to express the *absolute truth*, because it narrates a *sacred history*; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (*in illo tempore*). Being *real* and *sacred*, the myth becomes exemplary, and consequently *repeatable*, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification, for all human actions. In other words, a myth is a *true history* of what came to pass at the beginning of Time, and one which provides the pattern for human behaviour…Clearly, what we are dealing with here is a complete reversal of values;

[124] E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia, Part II," *op. cit*., p. 72.

whilst current language confuses the myth with 'fables', a man of the traditional societies sees it as the *only valid revelation of reality*."[125]

Myth is generally defined as a sacred tale "having to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth."[126] As Eliade documented, myths typically describe the central events of Creation, the latter understood by ancient man as something that "*really happened*, as an event that took place, in the plain sense of the term."[127] Indissolubly connected to this universally attested belief-system is the correlate belief that a stupendous catastrophe brought down the curtain on the paradisiacal conditions that formerly prevailed during a remembered Golden Age.[128]

Those familiar with ancient or indigenous belief systems and the content of myth will likely acknowledge the validity of Eliade's observations. Yet as insightful and compelling as his vision of myth proves to be, there is a fundamental flaw in Eliade's analysis: No explanation is offered for the origin of the specific themes associated with Creation itself—the primeval *hieros gamos*, the epoch-ending catastrophe, the dragon combat, the separation of heaven and earth, the departure of the astral gods to the sky, etc. Nor, for that matter, does Eliade have much to say on how the "transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time" interfaces with history or is to be understood in terms amenable to the methods of natural science.

It is on this score that the Saturn theory has an important contribution to make, for it proposes that each and every one of these archetypal mythical themes reflects and encodes specific *historical* events witnessed by ancient man the world over. It is our contention, moreover, that all truly archetypal mythological themes serve to describe and memorialize certain extraordinary events associated with the respective planets and the *recent* reordering of the solar system (the

[125] M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (London, 1957), pp. 23-24.
[126] S. Thompson, "Myth and Folktales," in T. Sebeok, *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington, 1955), p. 173. Alan Dundes, "Madness in Method Plus a Plea for Projective Inversion in Myth," in L. Patton & W. Doniger eds., *Myth and Method* (London, 1996), p. 147, writes: "For the folklorist, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and mankind came to be in their present form. Myths and legends (narratives told as true and set in the postcreation era) are different from folktales, which are narratives understood to be fictional."
[127] M. Eliade, *op. cit*., p. 15.
[128] *Ibid*., pp. 41-43. See also E. Cochrane, "Ladder to Heaven," *Aeon* 6:5 (2004), pp. 55-76.

events in question are understood to have occurred at some point in the prehistoric period between the Paleolithic Age and the rise of the earliest civilizations).

What is true for ancient myth also holds true with respect to the most important rituals of ancient man—those attending marriage, kingship, initiation, and death. It is as if ancient peoples the world over intentionally (or compulsively) set out to reenact and thus commemorate the dramatic events of Creation as they unfolded in the skies overhead.

Insofar as the planets were viewed as gods, the awe-inspiring and wholly *extraordinary* behavior of the respective planets provided the cosmic (divine) prototype and model for many sacred rituals. As Eliade points out:

"Every ritual has a divine model, an archetype; this fact is well enough known for us to confine ourselves to recalling a few examples. 'We must do what the gods did in the beginning (*Satapatha Brahmana*, VII, 2, 1, 4). 'Thus the gods did; thus men do' (*Taittiriya Brahmana*, I, 5, 9, 4). This Indian adage summarizes all the theory underlying rituals in all countries."[129]

Although he never cited them as evidence, the Skidi rituals commemorating the primeval marriage between Morning Star/Mars and Venus conform precisely to the ideological pattern described by Eliade. Witness the following observation offered by the anthropologist George Dorsey:

"In theory the Skidi Pawnee ceremonies all have as their object the performance either through drama or through ritual of the acts which were performed in the mythologic age. The ritual is a formal method of restating the acts of the supernatural beings in early times…"[130]

The symbolism surrounding the drilling of the sacred fire conforms to the same basic pattern and serves to illustrate the formative influence of celestial events. The Skidi viewed the drilling fire stick as the prototypical masculine power (Mars) while the hearth symbolized the female power

[129] M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959), p. 21.
[130] R. Linton, "The Origin of the Skidi Pawnee Sacrifice to the Morning Star," *American Anthropologist* 28 (1928), p. 461.

(Venus). The fire drill itself was said to have been a gift to Venus from Morning Star/Mars at the time of their marriage,[131] and Creation was commemorated every time a fire was kindled:

"The Skiri also conceive of the firesticks as male and female. The idea is that the kindling of fire symbolized the vitalizing of the world as recounted in the creation. Specifically, the hearth represents the Evening Star and the drill the Morning Star in the act of creation."[132]

Thus it is that, from a symbolic and structural standpoint, drilling the first fire is identical to the primeval *hieros gamos* between Venus and Mars.

In the chapters to follow, it will be shown that the Skidi traditions surrounding Venus and Mars have remarkable parallels around the globe, thereby corroborating their historical basis and fundamental reliability. The identification of the prototypical "fire-drill" with the planet Mars is a case in point. Thus, it is well known that ancient peoples everywhere considered the act of drilling fire to represent a symbolic counterpart of sexual intercourse, with the drilling fire stick deemed to be masculine in nature. Such a belief is attested amongst the Australian Aborigines, for example, where it was customary to give a firestick to young newlyweds.[133] Yet the prototypical firestick was expressly identified with the planet Mars: "This stick turned into the red star, Wildu (Mars)."[134]

[131] V. Del Chamberlain, *op. cit*., pp. 54-55.
[132] J. Murie, "Ceremonies of the Pawnee: Part I: The Skiri," *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (1981), p. 40.
[133] Dorothy Tunbridge, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming* (Canberra, 1988), p. 45.
[134] *Ibid*., p. 142.

The Many Loves of Aphrodite

"Aphrodite's origin remains as obscure as her name."[135]

Even today, the name Aphrodite evokes images of alluring beauty and erotic passion. The goddess is best known, perhaps, as a divine matchmaker and agent provocateur of sensual desire and infatuation, whose magical charms were enough to entice even the gods into acts of lust and illicit love. In the *Iliad*, for example, Aphrodite's *zone* (*kestos himas*) is said to arouse immediate desire in the eyes of its beholder.[136] As Walter Burkert points out, verbs formed from the goddess's name denote the act of love, a tendency found already in Homer.[137]

In Greek myth Aphrodite is known primarily for her liaisons with various gods and heroes. Her adulterous affair with Ares was the source of much amusement to the gods of Olympus in Homer's account.[138] Far from being an isolated or incidental report peculiar to the ocularly-challenged bard, Aphrodite's union with Ares was celebrated in ancient art and cult as well.[139] In perfect keeping with this tradition Pindar describes Ares as the "husband of Aphrodite."[140]

Although modern scholars have seldom asked whether there was a celestial dimension to the love affair between Aphrodite and Ares, it is interesting to note that at least one early chronicler sought to understand their union as a conjunction of planets. Witness the following commentary ascribed to the Greek writer Lucian:

[135] W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 153.
[136] *Iliad* 14:216.
[137] *Odyssey* 22:444.
[138] *Odyssey* 8:266-369.
[139] A. Furtwangler, "Ares," in W. Roscher ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884-1937), col. 481. See also S. Budin, *The Origin of Aphrodite* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 24.
[140] L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, *Vol. II* (New Rochelle, 1977), p. 623.

"All that he [Homer] hath said of Venus and of Mars his passion, is also manifestly composed from no other source than this science [astrology]. Indeed, it is the conjuncture of Venus and Mars that creates the poetry of Homer."[141]

Although relatively late and influenced by Greek astrological conceptions, Lucian's deduction gains additional credence in light of the Skidi testimony with regards to the primeval union of Mars and Venus.

An aura of mystery surrounds the origins of the Greek goddess of love. Burkert, upon surveying the evidence, confesses: "Aphrodite's origin remains as obscure as her name."[142] While Aphrodite is securely attested in the earliest epic literature, her name is absent from the Mycenaean religion as known from the Linear B tablets. Thus, it is likely that the cult of the goddess came to Greece in the period between 1200 BCE and 800.[143]

Whence, then, did Aphrodite arrive on Greek shores? For Homer, Hesiod, and other early writers, the goddess was intimately linked to Cyprus. The *Odyssey* lists Paphos as the goddess's homeland, while the *Iliad* makes *Kypris* her most common epithet.[144] Hesiod calls her both *Kyprogene* and *Kythereia*.

The search for Aphrodite's origins does not stop in Cyprus, a well-known melting pot of Oriental religious conceptions. Among leading scholars, there is something of a consensus that the cult of Aphrodite originally came to Greece from the ancient Near East: "Behind the figure of Aphrodite there clearly stands the ancient Semitic goddess of love, Ishtar-Astarte, divine consort of the king, queen of heaven, and hetaera in one."[145]

This view receives strong support from the Greeks themselves. Pausanias, for example, offered the following opinion: "The Assyrians were the first of the human race to worship the heavenly

[141] *Astrology* 22.
[142] W. Burkert, *op. cit*., p. 153.
[143] C. Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia* (London, 1994), pp. 176ff.
[144] *Ibid*., p. 153. According to C. Penglase, *op. cit*., p. 176, "The earliest evidence for Aphrodite in the Greek and Mycenaean area is the temple in Paphos."
[145] W. Burkert, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

one [Aphrodite *Urania*]; then the people of Paphos in Cyprus, and of Phoenician Askalon in Palestine, and the people of Kythera, who learnt her worship from the Phoenicians."[146]

That Aphrodite shares numerous characteristics in common with Ishtar is well known. As goddesses of love both are associated with rites of prostitution, for example.[147] Both are associated with sacred gardens. Aphrodite, like Ishtar, was represented as armed and invoked to guarantee victory. The strange beard accorded Aphrodite in ancient cult finds a precise parallel in the cult of Ishtar.

In his comprehensive survey of Aphrodite's cult, Burkert never once mentions the planet Venus. Here the renowned scholar is presumably just following the prevailing view, which does not recognize an early connection between the goddess and planet (the identification between Aphrodite and Venus is first attested in the *Epinomis*, now generally ascribed to Philip of Opus). Wolfgang Heimpel's opinion on this issue seems to represent the consensus among classicists:

"Originally, the goddess Aphrodite had nothing to do with the planet. The link was in all probability made as a result of Babylonian influence in the field of astronomy."[148]

Yet inasmuch as the Semitic Ishtar was specifically identified with Venus, it stands to reason that the Greek goddess originally shared this characteristic as well. In fact, it is our opinion that it is impossible to understand Aphrodite's cult and mythology apart from reference to the planet Venus.[149]

In order to determine whether Aphrodite's identification with Venus is fundamental in nature or relatively late in origin—as per the view of Heimpel and the vast majority of scholars—it is necessary to investigate her cult in some detail. Aphrodite's epithet *Urania* offers a valuable clue. As Farnell points out,[150] *Urania*—"the celestial one"—was a Greek translation of the

[146] Book I:14:7.
[147] C. Penglase, *op. cit.*, p. 163, citing Strabo 378 for Corinthian cults of prostitution associated with Aphrodite. Notice also the epithet Porne.
[148] W. Heimpel, "A Catalog of Near Eastern Venus Deities," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4:3 (1982), p. 11.
[149] E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 91-112.
[150] L. Farnell, *op. cit.*, p. 629.

Hebrew epithet *malkat ha-ßãmayim*, "the queen of the heavens," long understood as having reference to Venus.[151] Yet almost unbelievably, Farnell questions whether Aphrodite's epithet betrays an astral component! Such an opinion ignores the plain fact that this epithet finds precise parallels in the cults of other Venus-goddesses throughout the ancient world. Thus, a Sumerian hymn invokes Inanna as follows:

"To the great Queen of Heaven, Inanna, I want to address my greeting. To her who fills the sky with her pure blaze, to the luminous one, to Inanna, as bright as the sun…"[152]

The Akkadian Ishtar shares the same epithet. Witness the following hymn:

"Her very first name, her great appellation which her father Anu, whom she adores, named her of old, is Ninanna 'Queen of Heaven'."[153]

How is it possible to understand these early hymns to Inanna and Ishtar apart from reference to a celestial body?

In complete agreement with the religious literature, Babylonian astronomical tablets include the Sumerian epithet ^{d}*nin.dar.an.na*, "the bright, or vari-coloured, queen of heaven" among the various names for the planet Venus.[154]

The Queen of Heaven also figures prominently amongst the pagan gods mentioned in the Old Testament, and there was doubtless much truth in Jeremiah's admission (ca. 600 BCE) that the Israelites had long burnt incense to the stellar whore.[155] Although Jeremiah does not name the

[151] See L. Bobrova & A. Militarev, "From Mesopotamia to Greece: to the Origin of Semitic and Greek Star Names," ed. by H. Galter, *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens* (Graz, 1993), p. 315.
[152] F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 105.
[153] B. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 501.
[154] P. Gössmann, *Planetarium Babylonicum* (Rome, 1950), p. 35. See also L. Bobrova & A. Militarev, "From Mesopotamia to Greece: to the Origin of Semitic and Greek Star Names," in H. Galter ed., *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens* (Graz, 1993), p. 315.
[155] *Jeremiah* 44:17-25.

planetary goddess in question, Astarte seems a likely candidate.[156] Astarte's identification with the planet Venus is commonly acknowledged,[157] as is her fundamental affinity with Aphrodite. Indeed, an inscription from the Hellenistic period (ca. 160 BCE) identifies Astarte with Aphrodite *Urania*.[158]

Given this evidence from comparative religion, there would appear to be little justification for Farnell's view that Aphrodite *Urania* did not have a celestial component.

[156] W. Heimpel, *op. cit*., p. 21.
[157] J. Henninger, "Zum Problem der Venussterngottheit bei den Semiten," *Anthropos* 71 (1976), pp. 153ff. See also M. Astour, *Hellenosemitica* (Leiden, 1967), p. 116.
[158] W. Heimpel, *op. cit*., p. 21.

Aphrodite and Adonis

"Bethlehem which is now ours, the most august place in the universe…was shaded by the sacred wood of Tammuz, that is, Adonis. And in the grotto where the newborn Christ once cried, there were tears for the lover of Venus."[159]

The testimony of St. Jerome, taken together with that of numerous other ancient writers, attests to Adonis's former exalted status. What, then, do we know about Aphrodite's celebrated paramour?

According to Panyassis (early 5th century BCE), the newborn Adonis was so beautiful that Aphrodite jealously hid him away in a coffin. After handing him over to Persephone for safekeeping, Aphrodite was subsequently heartbroken upon learning that the goddess of the underworld refused to give him up. Here is the account as preserved by Apollodorus:

"Struck by his beauty, Aphrodite, in secret from the gods, hid him in a chest while he was still a little child, and entrusted him to Persephone. But when Persephone caught sight of him, she refused to give him back. The matter was submitted to the judgment of Zeus; and dividing the year into three parts, he decreed that Adonis should spend a third of the year by himself, a third with Persephone, and the remaining third with Aphrodite…Later, however, while he was hunting, Adonis was wounded by a boar and died."[160]

Although there are conflicting reports about the precise manner of the god's death, it is agreed that he died young and under tragic circumstances.[161] According to one version of the myth, Aphrodite is said to have leapt off the Leucadian rock out of grief for the beautiful youth.[162]

[159] St. Jerome, Letters 58, 3 as translated by R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996), p. 148.
[160] Apollodorus, *The Librar*y III:14:4 as translated in R. Hand ed., *The Library of Greek Mythology* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 131-132.
[161] According to Apollodorus, "Adonis died in a hunt while he was still a young boy, from a wound inflicted by a boar."
[162] See the discussion in L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, *Vol. II* (New Rochelle, 1977), p. 650.

Aphrodite's passion for Adonis is attested as early as Sappho (ca. 600 BCE). In a fragment attributed to the melancholy poet of Lesbos, one finds an early reference to the ritual lamentations that distinguished the god's cult:

"He is dying, O Cytherean, the tender Adonis! What shall we do? Beat your breasts, young maidens, and tear your tunics!"[163]

Bion, writing in the mid-second century BCE, composed a lengthy poem recounting Adonis's tragic fate. In his account it is the goddess Aphrodite herself who bloodied her breasts while mourning the youth's death:

"But Aphrodite, having let down her hair, rushes through the woods mourning, unbraided, unsandalled; and the thorns cut her as she goes and pluck sacred blood. Shrilly wailing, through long winding dells she wanders, crying out the Assyrian cry, calling her consort and boy. Around her floated her dark robe at her navel; her chest was made scarlet by her hands; the breasts below, snowy before, grew crimson for Adonis."[164]

The wailing rites alluded to by Sappho and Bion betray the telltale influence of Dumuzi's cult, whose proverbial lamentations are first attested in Mari during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800-1600 BCE) but undoubtedly go back much further still, likely to the dawn of civilization itself. Lamentations for the god are most familiar from the testimony of Ezekiel, who wrote as follows of the abominations then current at Jerusalem: "Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."[165] Like the god himself, such rites proved very difficult to extinguish and were still being performed by the Sabean women of Harran as late as the tenth century CE.[166]

[163] Fragment 152 as translated in R. Turcan, *op. cit*., p. 144.
[164] Epitaph on Adonis, lines 19-27 as quoted in J. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 123-125.
[165] *Ezekiel* 8:14.
[166] B. Alster, "Tammuz," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1569.

The Adonis-myth formed the subject of several Greek rituals during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.[167] Women were the primary participants in the rites in question, known as Adonia, which were typically celebrated on rooftops, thereby emulating the Oriental custom. Interestingly, ladders formed a conspicuous element in the god's cult:

"According to textual evidence, Adonis rites were performed on the roofs of houses. The iconography contains some striking scenes in which ladders are outstanding features."[168]

In Athens, the Adonia featured the parading forth of the god's body and its burial, followed by a period of general licentiousness marked by drinking and dancing.[169] Further details, unfortunately, are lacking with regards to the precise order and content of the Attic rites. Walter Burkert emphasized the link with the ancient Near East in his summary of Adonis's cult in ancient Greece:

"There remain enough lacunae and uncertainties in our knowledge. Still we can feel confident as to the general outline: the yearly festival of weeping for Tammuz spread from Mesopotamia to Syria to Palestine, and thence, with the name 'Adonis,' to Greece. At Jerusalem, as still in fifth-century Athens, this is not an established state festival, but an unofficial ceremony spontaneously performed by women, and viewed with suspicion by the dominant male."[170]

Outside of Greece proper, there are indications that the cult of Adonis was once widely disseminated throughout the Mediterranean region. In Rome, as in Athens, Adonia were celebrated. Numerous Roman murals, according to Robert Turcan, show "Adonis being carried away by Venus."[171] The love of Adonis and Aphrodite was also a familiar subject on Etruscan mirrors from the fourth century BCE.

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[167] S. Ribichini, "Adonis," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 12-17.
[168] T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 127. On the iconography of the ladder in the Adonia, see R. Rosenzweig, *Worshipping Aphrodite* (Ann Arbor, 2004), pp. 63-68.
[169] F. Graf, "Aphrodite," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 120.
[170] W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 107.
[171] R. Turcan, *op. cit*., p. 145.

Adonis was especially popular at Byblos, a Phoenician stronghold of great antiquity.[172] Indeed, there is much reason to believe that Adonis was Astarte's youthful consort at Byblos. An eyewitness to the rites practiced there—Lucian (2nd Century CE)—reported that the god experienced a resurrection:

"As a memorial of his suffering each year they beat their breasts, mourn and celebrate the rites. Throughout the land they perform solemn lamentations. When they cease their breast-beating and weeping, they first sacrifice to Adonis as if to a dead person, but then, on the next day, they proclaim that he lives and send him into the air."[173]

Origen (3rd century CE) likewise attests to Adonis's resurrection in ancient cult:

"The god whom the Greeks called Adonis is called Tammuz by the Jews and the Syrians, as they say. It seems that certain sacred ceremonies are practiced each year; first, they weep for him as if he ceased to live; then they rejoice for him as if he had risen from the dead."[174]

Jerome, writing slightly later than Origen (ca. 345-419), provides complementary testimony in favor of a rite of resurrection involving Adonis. Thus, in his commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome wrote as follows:

"What we have rendered as Adonis, the Hebrew and Syrian languages denote as Tammuz. According to a pagan tale, Venus's lover, a very beautiful youth, is killed…After this, he is said to have risen…There is an annual celebration of his feast, in which women bewail him as dead, and then he is praised in song when he returns to life…The same pagans interpret, in a subtle manner, the poets' narratives of a similar kind, narratives about shameful things: they understand the sequence of wailing and joy as referring to the death and resurrection of Adonis. They take

[172] Vase fragments from the Fifth Dynasty reign of Unas have been found at Byblos. See W. Stevenson Smith, "The Old Kingdom in Egypt…," in I. Edwards et al eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. 1:2 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 189.
[173] *De Dea Syria* 6.
[174] Sel. in Ez. 8:14 as quoted in S. Ribichini, *op. cit*., col. 16.

his death to be shown by the seeds that die in the earth, and his resurrection by the crops in which the dead seeds are born."[175]

Cyril of Alexandria, writing in the 5th century of the current era, commented on the Adonis rites then being celebrated in his native city. Cyril's disdain for the Greek practice is everywhere apparent:

"They pretended to unite in weeping and lamentations with Aphrodite when she was mourning Adonis's death. Then, when she reappeared from the Netherworld and announced that she had found the one she had been looking for, [they pretended] to unite in rejoicing and jumping [for joy]. And even today this comedy is still being performed in the temples of Alexandria."[176]

In addition to the ritual wailings, there is evidence that the Adonia featured a *hieros gamos* between the youthful hero and Aphrodite/Astarte. Such was the case in the rites practiced in Ptolemaic Alexandria, according to Theocritus (4th/5th century CE). The Alexandrian rites have been summarized by Sergio Ribichini as follows:

"The first day the participants celebrated the union between the two lovers, represented in the course of a banquet under a kiosk of dill stems and surrounded by fruits, delightful gardens, pots of perfumes and a big variety of cakes. On the second day the epithalamium gave way to a lament as the worshippers gathered for a funeral procession to carry the image of Adonis to the seashore."[177]

The sacred marriage between Aphrodite and Adonis can't help but recall the *hieros gamos* associated with the Sumerian Inanna and Dumuzi. Inasmuch as the Sumerian rite had its origin and *raison d'être* in ancient conceptions associated with the planet Venus, one is naturally led to suspect that similar conceptions informed the aboriginal cult of Aphrodite and Adonis.

[175] *Explanations in Ezekiel* III, 8, 14 as quoted from T. Mettinger, *op. cit*., p. 130.
[176] *Isaiam* 18:1-2 as quoted in T. Mettinger, *op. cit*., p. 123.
[177] S. Ribichini, *op. cit*., col. 13.

That there was a celestial dimension to the Adonis myth is also evidenced by the fact that his rites were typically celebrated on rooftops. It was on rooftops, after all, that astronomical observations and offerings were commonly made throughout the ancient Near East.[178] Jeremiah's testimony is especially instructive in this regard:

"And the house of Jerusalem, and the houses of kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods."[179]

The Judaic rites are reminiscent of practices described in the sacred marriage hymn of Iddin-Dagan from more than a thousand years earlier. There one reads that incense was offered to the planet Venus on the rooftops:

"Everybody hastens to holy Inana. For my lady in the midst of heaven the best of everything is prepared (?). In the pure places of the plain, at its good places, on the roofs, on the rooftops, the rooftops of dwellings (?), in the sanctuaries (?) of mankind, incense offerings like a forest of aromatic cedars are transmitted to her."[180]

The Adonis rites are significant not only for the clues they provide with respect to the celestial context of the sacred marriage rite but for the light they shed on dying gods in general and the myth of Dumuzi in particular. How, then, are we to understand the god behind these curious rites? As Ribichini points out with reference to the cult at Byblos, the name Adonis is most likely an epithet of a great god:

"He must indeed have been a god of high rank. It is probable that the cult of Adonis in Byblos continued the worship of a Phoenician 'Baal', conceived as a dying and rising god. This god

[178] M. Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and its Background," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 4 (1972), pp. 151-154. See also *Zephaniah* 1:5.
[179] *Jeremiah*, 19:13.
[180] Lines 142ff. in J. Black et al, *op. cit*., p. 266.

was not merely a spring deity or vegetation spirit, as Frazer believed, but an important city god comparable to Melqart in Tyre and Eshmun in Sidon."[181]

Melqart, in fact, was addressed as *Adon*, "my lord," the epithet from which derives the name of Adonis.[182] At Tyre, Melqart was the beloved consort of Astarte/Venus, thereby occupying a position similar to that of Adonis at Byblos.[183] Early on identified with Nergal, Melqart is best understood as a personification of the planet Mars (see chapter six),[184] and therefore it is interesting to find that Tyre was renowned for its worship of the red planet.[185] One Arabic author, writing in the first decades of the 14th century CE, offered direct testimony on the matter: "Among [the temples that were found] in the city of [Tyre], near the waterside, a temple of Mars."[186]

The author in question—Al-Dimashqi—goes on to state that Tammuz himself was to be identified with the planet Mars: "The Sabaeans contended that [Jerusalem] had been built before Solomon, peace be on him, and that the city had a temple of Mars where an idol called Tammuz was found."[187] How or from what sources Al-Dimashqi derived this information is not clear. That said, the fact that the Greek astronomer Ptolemy identified Adonis with the red planet offers some support for Al-Dimashqi's claim. Thus, in a discussion of the inhabitants of Syria in his *Tetrabiblos*, the greatest astronomer of the ancient world wrote as follows:

"Those who live in these countries generally worship Venus as the mother of the gods, calling her by various local names, and Mars as Adonis, to whom again they give other names, and they celebrate in their honour certain mysteries accompanied by lamentations."[188]

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[181] S. Ribichini, *op. cit*., col. 14.
[182] KAI 47.
[183] T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 126.
[184] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 42-48. See also S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1989), p. 164: "The name of Melqart, chief god of Tyre, is a Phoenician translation of the Sumerian name Nergal, and they are thus very closely assimilated."
[185] H. Seyrig, "Antiquités Syriennes," *Syria* 64 (1944-45), p. 70, cites Saleh ibn Yahya for the worship of Mars in Tyre.
[186] Quoted from J. Hjärpe, *Analyse Critique des Traditions Arabes sur les Sabéens Harraniens* (Uppsala, 1972), p. 75. Note: I am indebted to Rens van der Sluijs for this reference and the translation thereof.
[187] Ibid.
[188] II, 3, 68. F. Robbins, translator, *Ptolemy: Tetrabiblos* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 146-149. I am indebted to Rens van der Sluijs for this reference.

Ptolemy's primary works stem from the first half of the second century CE. The fact that he wrote from Alexandria, a hotbed of Adonis-worship, suggests that Ptolemy was uniquely qualified to comment on the possible astronomical aspects of the Adonis-myth.

Aphrodite and Phaon

"Children, Kypris is not Kypris alone, but she is called by many names. She is Hades, she is immortal life, she is raving madness, she is unmixed desire, she is lamentation; in her is all activity, all tranquility, all that leads to violence. For she sinks into the vitals of all that have life; who is not greedy for that goddess?"[189]

If the cult of Aphrodite encodes ancient conceptions associated with the planet Venus, it must be expected that astronomical events will inform and help illuminate specific details in the sacred traditions surrounding the goddess. In order to investigate this hypothesis we propose to offer a comparative analysis of Aphrodite's rendezvous with Phaon.

A curious story, popular in Greek comedy and preserved in fragmentary fashion by various ancient writers, relates that Aphrodite once befriended an ugly old ferryman named Phaon after the latter had aided the goddess in crossing the Aegean. In return for his random act of kindness, the goddess rewarded the old man by magically transforming him into a handsome youth.[190]

In addition to these basic facts, there are also hints that Aphrodite and Phaon were lovers. Thus, Athenaios reports that the Cytherean goddess was in love with the ferryman, citing Kratinos, Euboulos and Kallimachos as authorities.[191] Kratinos wrote that Phaon was the most beautiful man on earth and that Aphrodite had hidden him away in order to keep him for herself.[192]

[189] From a fragment attributed to Sophocles, as quoted in Stephanie Budin, *The Origin of Aphrodite* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 18.
[190] Sappho fragment 211 LP. G. Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), p. 177, writes simply that Aphrodite conferred "youth and beauty on Phaon."
[191] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* 2.69d.
[192] PCG IV fragment 370; Kallimachus fragment 478. See also L. Köppel, "Phaon," in H. Cancik & H. Schneider eds., *Der Neue Pauly* 9 (Stuttgart, 2000), col. 736.

Although Palaephatos (late 4th century BCE) is our earliest source for the story in question, Menander (ca. 324 BCE) and other writers also allude to it.[193] Aphrodite's encounter with Phaon is also depicted on several vase paintings.[194]

Considered in isolation, it is difficult to make much headway in deciphering the original significance of these fragmentary traditions from ancient Greece. Certainly it is far from obvious that planetary interactions hold the key to Aphrodite's tryst with Phaon. For additional insight into the origins of the Greek legend we turn to consider sacred traditions from aboriginal South America.

A fascinating myth, widespread in South America, is the so-called "Star Woman" cycle (A762.2 in Thompson's Index). The basic plot finds a beautiful star visiting Earth and carrying off a mortal to make her lover or husband. In most versions of the myth, the mortal paramour is distinguished by his old age, ugliness, or some deformity, yet as a result of his union with the Star Woman he is magically transformed into a handsome youth. Occasionally it is reported that the Star Woman and her lover ascend to heaven and live happily ever after. A few examples of this myth will serve to illustrate its relevance for understanding the Greek account of Aphrodite and Phaon.

In the first decade of the 20th century, Alberto Fric became the first white man to record a sampling of Chamacoco lore (the latter tribe hails from the Paraguayan Chaco). Included in his collection is the following narrative telling of a Star Woman's love for a homely mortal:

"Formerly the star Venus was a woman who fell in love with a homely man. Thanks to her magic, he became very handsome."[195]

Several different versions of this story were subsequently obtained from other Chamacoco informants. Although most are more elaborate and embellished than Fric's brief account, the

[193] Palaephatos 48. The best summary of the extant sources is that of Stein, "Phaon," *RE* 38 (Stuttgart, 1938), cols. 1790-1796. See also T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 103-104.
[194] *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, Vol. 7* (Zurich, 1994), pp. 364-367.
[195] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chamacoco Indians* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 97.

same basic plot is usually recognizable. In their compendium of Chamacoco lore, Wilbert and Simoneau include a version narrated by Bruno Barras, the highlights of which are as follows:

"Once there was a bachelor. Every night when he lay down to sleep he wished he had a beautiful wife, a fair-skinned wife. Lying in bed at night he would see the star called Iozly [Venus]…Then the star came…She said: 'Don't be afraid. Because you have been looking at me year after year I have now come to sleep with you. I want to be your wife…"[196]

In the ensuing weeks, Star Woman continued to make nocturnal visits to Earth. The natives eventually grew restless and more than a little jealous at the dramatic transformation in the bachelor's appearance:

"When she lay down with him there was a light emanating from her, illuminating everything…By now the other people and some girls were very envious of the young man's family because they looked so fair and beautiful. The man used to be dark and ugly, but when he slept with Iozly every night he grew better and better looking until he was fair and handsome, with smooth, fair hair."[197]

The Star Woman cycle is widely distributed amongst the various tribes native to the Gran Chaco region, including the Apinaye, Chorote, Makka, Mocoví, and Toba. Of the Star Woman myth in general, the anthropologist Alfred Métraux wrote: "This tale is very popular with Chaco Indians, and it is generally the first story they tell when asked about their folklore."[198]

A Chorote version of the myth serves to complement the Chamococo narrative. Here, too, a mortal of grotesque appearance formed the object of Venus's affections:

"There was a man who was so ugly that no woman wanted him. All the women in his village persecuted him, throwing sticks at him. At night he lay down to sleep outside and started to look up at Katés: 'What a pretty girl! How I should like to marry her!'…The following night Katés

[196] *Ibid*., p. 85.
[197] *Ibid*., pp. 85-86.
[198] A. Métraux, *Myths of the Toba and Pilagá Indians of the Gran Chaco* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 46.

descended to the earth and had intercourse with the young man. When dawn was near she said to him: 'I come from the sky, and at night I shall be your wife. Do not tell anybody that I have come. I do not go about during the daytime, and so that no one will see me I am going to hide inside that gourd."[199]

Another Chorote informant offered a slightly different version of the Star Woman narrative. It begins as follows:

"In primordial times, a young man was outside every night, looking at beautiful stars, for the stars were women. He especially looked at Katés (Morning Star), thinking: 'I should like her to be my wife.'"[200]

The youth had first gained Star Woman's attention by shooting an arrow at her. As a result of this affront she promises to visit him:

"Exactly at midnight the woman came. Now he had a wife. In the morning everyone looked at the young man whom nobody had wanted previously. No girl from his village liked him."[201]

In order to keep their affair a secret from the other tribesmen, Star Woman asks her mortal lover to find a gourd so she can enter into it and remain concealed from sight. Eventually, following further adventures—one of which found Star Woman forced to reconstitute her dismembered lover's body—"she took him with her to the sky where she lives."[202]

The Ge of Central Brazil tell a very similar story. As recorded by Wilbert and Simoneau, the narrative begins as follows:

[199] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chorote Indians* (Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 265-266.
[200] *Ibid*., p. 257.
[201] *Ibid*., p. 257.
[202] *Ibid*., p. 261.

"A boy was lying down in the middle of the plaza, and Katxere was looking down at him. She felt sorry, and said: 'I am going to marry that boy.'"[203]

After sleeping with the boy, Star Woman tells him to hide her in a basket (*kaipo*) or gourd (*combuca*).[204]

A Toba narrative preserves the same basic plot but adds a few interesting twists. Explicitly identified with the planet Venus, Star Woman is described as having "long hair."[205] As in other versions of the tale, the mortal hero "hid her in a large gourd so that no one would see her."[206] Once again Star Woman's lover is described as grotesquely ugly, here attributed to his scabrous body:

"A very poor man who was covered with scabs was liked by nobody because of his disease. But the morning star, a woman who lives in the sky and who uses two mortars to pound algarroba, felt sorry for him, descended to the earth, and carried him to the sky."[207]

According to the Toba version of the myth, Star Woman led her scabrous husband to a garden whereupon she transformed him "into a handsome young man."[208] The magical transformation of the wretched mortal at the hands of Venus offers a striking thematic parallel to Phaon's dramatic metamorphosis at the hands of Aphrodite. Indeed, the fact that the planet Venus, as Star Woman, is credited with beautifying her scabrous paramour constitutes compelling circumstantial evidence that Aphrodite personifies Venus in her interactions with Phaon.

[203] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Ge Indians* (Los Angeles, 1978), p. 195.
[204] *Ibid*.
[205] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Toba Indians, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 55.
[206] *Ibid*., p. 181.
[207] *Ibid*., pp. 61-62.
[208] *Ibid*., p. 56. See also A. Métraux, *op. cit*., p. 44 where it is reported: "Upon nearing the garden, she transformed her husband into a handsome young man."

Sky-Maiden

Although it is attested around the globe, in most instances the Star Woman myth has been localized and humanized to such an extent that the heroine's link to the planet Venus has been obscured or even lost entirely. In the sacred lore of South Africa, Star Woman is represented as the beautiful daughter of a heavenly "chief" who, together with her female companions, was in the habit of journeying to Earth to bathe in a local lake. It was said that the only way to capture Sky Maiden was to steal her plume, a feat that the youths of noble bloodlines had consistently failed to accomplish. As fate would have it, it is a poor boy that eventually succeeds in stealing the plume and thereby secures her hand in marriage:

"There was a chief who lived in heaven. He had a child, a very beautiful girl…Every day the princess and her nurse and the other girls came down from the sky to bathe in a lake… When the sons of royalty and of nobility had failed to take the Sky girls, a youth, the son of a poor man, said he would go and try to take the plume of the Sky girl. Those youths who had failed to take the plume laughed heartily at him; but he persisted…The Sky girls arrived; and, after they had gone into the water, this youth took the plume of the princess…The princess asked the youth (to marry her), saying, 'Wait, you shall marry me.' The youth stopped, and the princess said as follows: 'you shall go with me to my home in the sky.' The Sky person and the young man went to the sky."[209]

In the New Hebrides (Melanesia), the natives of Leper's Island recount Tagaro's misadventures with a beautiful swan-maiden. The anthropologist Codrington summarized this narrative as follows:

"It was Tagoro…who married the winged woman—a Banewonowono or Vinmara, Web-wing or Dove-skin—from heaven…These women flew down from heaven to bathe, and Tagoro watched

[209] F. Boas & C. Simango, "Tales and Proverbs of the Vandau of Portuguese South Africa," *Journal of American Folklore* 35 (1922), pp. 200-201.

them. He saw them take off their wings, stole one pair, and hid them at the foot of the main pillar of his house. He then returned and found all fled but the wingless one, and he took her to his house and presented her to his mother as his wife."[210]

A version of the Sky Maiden myth collected from the Halmahera (Indonesia) contains several mythemes of interest. Here the mortal hero is described as "very ugly and covered with sores." As in other versions of the myth from this part of the world, the poor wretch hides in wait and steals the clothes of a beautiful Sky Maiden, thereby preventing her from returning to heaven. The two forthwith become husband and wife and ascend to heaven in a magical flying palace (Indonesian myth is distinguished by its numerous fabulous elements and this tradition is no exception in that regard).[211] Eventually, thanks to an old woman who took pity on him, the forlorn hero was cured of his hideous sores.

The Toradja in Central Celebes (Indonesia) preserved an interesting variant on the Sky Maiden theme. There a hero named Magoenggoelota absconds with the clothes of a heavenly maiden with the predictable result that she is forced to marry him. Upon being deprived of her ability to fly to heaven, Sky Maiden utters the following words:

"You don't need to hold me; I will not go away, for I do not know the road. If you are fond of me, put me in your betel-box."[212]

As requested, Magoenggoelota puts the Sky Maiden in his box and takes her home. One is reminded here of the gourd or basket within which Star Woman was concealed and transported in South American lore. The fact that the same general idea can be found in the sacred narratives of the Australian Aborigines—wherein Venus is described as confined within a mesh bag[213]—raises intriguing questions as to the origin of this widespread mytheme. Are we to imagine a celestial stimulus here as well? Or are we to assume that this particular mytheme diffused from the South Pacific to South America (or vice versa)?

[210] R. Codrington, *The Melanesians* (Oxford, 1969), p. 172.
[211] R. Dixon, "Oceanic Mythology," in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1916), p. 208.
[212] *Ibid*., p. 207.
[213] J. Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming, 40,000 years of Australian History* (Sydney, 1980), p. 154.

In a tale from North Celebes, a farmer named Walasindouw is annoyed to discover that his yams are being stolen during the night. Lying in wait, the man discovers that the thief is a Sky Maiden who, together with her companions, comes down to Earth to bathe:

"When she was in his power [because he had taken her clothes] she asked forgiveness of him (for the theft), pleading that she was a child of heaven. Walasindouw, being unmarried, immediately made her his wife."[214]

In the aforementioned tales collected from Oceanic tribes, there is no explicit identification of the Sky Maiden with the planet Venus. But, although rare, such examples can be found. Witness the following Papuan tradition from Dutch New Guinea (Melanesia) wherein the Sky Maiden is represented as a thief, as in the previous tradition from North Celebes:

"The Papuans of Geelvink Bay, on the northern coast of Dutch New Guinea, tell of an old man [Mangoendi] who used to earn his living by selling the intoxicating juice of the sago-palm. But to his vexation he often found that the vessels, which he had set overnight to catch the dripping juice of the tapped palms, were drained dry in the morning. As the people in his village denied all knowledge of the theft, he resolved to watch, and was lucky enough to catch the thief in the very act, and who should the thief be but the Morning Star? To ransom herself from his clutches she bestowed on him a magical stick or wand, the possession of which ensured to its owner the fulfillment of every wish. In time the old man married a wife, but she was not pleased that her husband was so old and so covered with scabs. So one day he resolved to give her a joyful surprise by renewing his youth with the help of his magic wand. For this purpose he retired into the forest and kindled a great fire of iron-wood. When the flames blazed up he flung himself among the glowing embers, and immediately his shriveled skin peeled off, and all the scabs were turned into copper trinkets, beautiful corals, and gold and silver bracelets. He himself came forth from the fire a handsome young man."[215]

[214] S. Hickson, *A Naturalist in North Celebes* (London, 1889), p. 265.
[215] J. Frazer, *Apollodorus: The Library, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 361. See also J.B. van Hasselt, "Die Noeforezen," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 8 (1876), pp. 176-178.

Here, as in the Toba narrative from South America, the scabrous old man is cured of his affliction and transformed into a handsome youth through the magical machinations of a Star Woman. And in New Guinea, as in South America, the Star Woman is explicitly identified with the planet Venus. The indisputable thematic parallels between the two accounts—vastly removed in time and space—confirm that we have to do with a very widespread tradition, however it is to be understood from an astronomical standpoint.

The Morning Star

If the Star Woman is to be identified with the planet Venus, how are we to understand her mortal paramour? And what are we to make of a planet consorting with or "marrying" a mortal?

An important clue is provided by the widespread belief that the most prominent stars formerly resided on earth. The following tradition from Aboriginal Australia may be taken as representative in this regard:

"All over Australia, it is believed that the stars and planets were once men, women and animals in Creation times, who flew up to the sky as a result of some mishap on earth and took refuge there in their present form."[216]

The very same idea is attested amongst the Skidi Pawnee of North America. Thus, Von Del Chamberlain reports that: "The Skidi believed that the stars were either gods or people who had once lived on earth and had been changed into stars at death."[217]

If the planets were once thought to reside on earth, it stands to reason that Star Woman's mortal paramour might well have been a planet prior to the cataclysm that resulted in his "flying" up to the sky and joining his stellar benefactress. And that, in fact, is exactly what the evidence suggests.

One of the most instructive myths in this regard comes from the Sikuani Indians of the Orinoco region of Colombia and Venezuela. Virtually unknown prior to the 20th century, the Sikuani long resisted the best efforts of clerics and researchers to infiltrate their culture and observe their sacred practices. In fact, it is only in the last fifty years that anthropologists have succeeded in

[216] J. Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming, 40,000 years of Australian History* (Sydney, 1980), p. 141.
[217] V. Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982), p. 48.

recording the tribe's oral traditions, a number of which preserve what appear to be extremely archaic mythological motifs. The Creation myth of the Sikuani begins as follows:

"In those days the sun and the moon and everyone were human beings and lived on this earth. Sun had a son who had sores all over his body; he was the morning star."[218]

The Sikuani belief that "Morning Star" was covered with sores is paralleled elsewhere—in Mesoamerica, for example, the Morning Star is described as pimpled all over[219]—and naturally recalls the aforementioned Toba narrative in which Star Woman's lover is described as "covered with scabs." Indeed, as we intend to document, a wealth of evidence suggests that Venus's mortal paramour is to be identified with the mythical "Morning Star," understood here as the planet Mars.

That the masculine "Morning Star" is to be distinguished from Star Woman—and thus from the planet Venus—is patently obvious in Skidi lore, as noted in chapter one. The same distinction is also evident in South American lore. Witness the following Mataco tradition:

"The morning star is an old man who has a big fire. His fire is cold. The star-woman was the daughter of the morning star."[220]

In order to make sense of the mythological traditions surrounding the respective planets it is essential to recognize that the mythical "Morning Star" and Venus are two entirely different planetary bodies. Hitherto scholars have assumed that by "Morning Star" the planet Venus was inevitably denoted. Given the present order of the solar system, wherein Venus forms the most prominent star in the morning skies, this hypothesis is perfectly sensible as a starting point. Yet a comparative analysis of ancient myth will show that the mythical Morning Star is always to be identified with the planet Mars. The planet Venus, in turn, is to be identified with the Mother Goddess, the consort or love interest of the mythical Morning Star.

[218] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), p. 26.
[219] See W. Lehmann, "Ergebnisse einer mit Unterstützung der Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft in den Jahren 1925/1926 ausgeführten Forschungsreise nach Mexiko und Guatemala," *Anthropos* 23 (1928), pp. 749-791. Of the Morning Star Viejito, it is said that he "has pimples all over."
[220] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Mataco Indians* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 49.

To return to the Sikuani narrative involving the Morning Star: It is reported that he showed great prowess as a warrior while still a child:

"Morning Star, growing larger than his father and brothers, won all the fights. He won over his father and over his brothers; he came out of the mêlée winning his fights like a king…"[221]

Morning Star's extraordinary success as a fighter is credited to an unusual ability to "grow larger" in size. The sudden increase in size associated with the warring Morning Star can't help but remind us of Dumuzi's "swelling" to enormous proportions while fighting the powers of chaos. The comparison of "Morning Star" to a "king," in turn, is also noteworthy inasmuch as it forms an interesting parallel to Dumuzi's enthroning in the wake of his battle with the rebel powers. Thus, in BM 96739 it is stated that Inanna established Dumuzi as king: "You then seated king Amaußumgalanna on your sacred dais."[222] Dumuzi's enthronement likely commemorates the fact that the warrior-star was installed as "king" by virtue of his defeat of the powers of chaos or—in a variant interpretation of the same extraordinary events—as soon as he "married" the Venus-goddess, the latter of whom embodied sovereignty and was responsible for investing the king with his regal powers (see chapter ten).[223]

Most important, perhaps, is the report that the hideous looking Morning Star was subsequently transformed into a handsome youth:

"The girl who had been given to Morning Star by his uncle did not want him because he was very ugly. When Morning Star realized that the girl did not want him, he left and spent the day traveling. The next morning he bathed and turned into the handsomest man in the world." [224]

[221] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[222] *Ibid*.
[223] The classic example in this regard is the Sumerian warrior-hero Ninurta. See the discussion in A. Annus, *The God Ninurta* (Helsinki, 2002), p. 5. On the goddess as embodying sovereignty, see H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton, 1946), p. 177.
[224] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 25-28.

The transformation of the sore-laden "Morning Star" into a handsome youth recalls the beautification of Star Woman's scabrous paramour in Toba myth. Indeed, in our view the two narratives represent structural analogues.

That said, in the Sikuani narrative there is no explicit mention of the Star Woman. Yet the Sikuani preserved another sacred narrative involving a hero who is likewise described as having "sores all over his body."[225] The hero in question—Jarrawato—was cured of his affliction by a star woman whereupon he assumed a beautiful form and ascended to the sky as a star.[226] The fact that Jarrawato is described as shining in the morning sky suggests that he is to be identified with the mythical "Morning Star."[227]

A Sherente narrative recorded by the anthropologist Curt Nimuendajú provides additional support for the view that Star Woman's mortal paramour is to be identified with the mythical Morning Star. A Central Ge tribe residing along the Rio Tocantins in eastern Brazil, the Sherente remember "Morning Star" as a human being:

"Venus [our Morning Star] was living in human shape among men. His body was covered with malodorous ulcers, and behind him was buzzing a swarm of blowflies. All the people turned up their noses when he passed and refused him when asked permission to rest in their houses. At the end of the village he got to Waikaura's house, who invited Venus in, did not permit him to sit on the bare ground, but ordered the children to bring a new mat. He asked his guest whence he came and whither he was bound, and the visitor replied he had lost his way. Waikaura' had water heated for washing the ulcers. Venus wanted to do this outdoors, but his host insisted on having it done within. He also called his virgin daughter, bade Venus sit on her thighs, and washed him in this position. Then he called for araca' leaves, grated them up in water, and again washed him. Thus the visitor recovered."[228]

[225] *Ibid*., p. 105.
[226] *Ibid*., pp. 10, 111.
[227] *Ibid*., p. 111.
[228] C. Nimuendajú, "The Íerenté," *Publication of the Frederick Webb Hodge Anniversary Publication Fund* (Los Angeles, 1942), pp. 91-92.

In return for this act of kindness, Morning Star warns Waikaura' of an impending flood. At the same time, he admits to having violated the old man's daughter:

"He ordered Waikaura' to kill a juruty dove (*Leptoptila rufaxilla*), and his host went away, leaving the daughter, on whose thighs the guest had sat, to entertain him. When Waikaura' had returned with the dove, Venus immediately told him that he had deflowered his daughter and asked what indemnity he was to pay. But Waikaura', despite his visitor's urging, refused any form of compensation. Venus had the dove split open and spread apart by means of little sticks. He tied it to a cord a fathom in length, and Waikaura' had to suspend it from a tree by the spring. Before daybreak he ordered him to go down and see what had become of the dove. To Waikaura's amazement it had turned into a big boat. In the morning Waikaura' packed his belongings into the boat, while Venus took leave and departed. Hardly had he gone fifty paces when a whirlwind lifted him up to the sky, where he vanished. At nightfall Waikaura' put himself and his family on board. Then the flood came and carried them all away…Only Waikaura' and his family escaped."[229]

In addition to presenting an obvious parallel to the Sikuani "Morning Star," the ulcerous Starman recalls the scab-laden mortal transformed into a beautiful youth by the Star Woman in Toba myth. Such facts, considered in conjunction with the clear distinction between the sore-laden hero and the planet Venus (as Star Woman) in the Toba and Papuan traditions, supports the conclusion that the Sherente hero is to be identified with the mythical "Morning Star" and not with Venus (as per Nimuendajú).

[*For a vestige of Venus as Star Woman in the Sherente narrative we would look towards the virgin daughter of Waikaura', raped by the ulcerous visitor.[230] It was on the virgin's "lap" that the Sherente Starman was cured of his ulcerous sores, much as the union with Star Woman cured the ugly mortal in other examples of this myth in South America. That the virgin daughter corresponds to Star Woman is further supported by the fact that the latter is often represented in

[229] *Ibid*., p. 92.
[230] C. Lévi-Strauss offers a similar opinion in *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago, 1969), p. 251.

South American myth as having been raped, an act that typically leads to one disaster or another.[231]]

From the standpoint of comparative mythology, the Star Woman cycle of myths provides compelling circumstantial evidence that the Greek traditions surrounding Aphrodite and Phaon have reference to the interplanetary affairs of the planet Venus. This in itself is an important finding, one with profound and far-reaching implications for the history of religion.

That said, there is every reason to believe that the Star Woman myth has much more to tell us. A number of parallels can be drawn between this myth and the Sumerian traditions describing the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi. For example, a prominent component of the sacred marriage rite finds the mortal king achieving divinity— "stardom" in a quite literal sense—upon marrying the planet Venus. This is evidenced by the fact that early kings who performed the rite had the mark of divinity appended to their names and received divine honors after their death.[232] The "deification" of the king, in our view, has its mythological prototype in Dumuzi's catasterization or apotheosis upon marrying Venus. Thus, in "The Ascension of Dumuzi to Heaven" the mortal hero is installed as a star alongside Inanna/Venus.[233] The same idea is implicit in BM 96739, as we have documented.

A catasterization of the mortal hero is also attested in several versions of the Star Woman myth. Thus it is that the mortal paramour is suddenly taken up to heaven to live alongside Venus, one narrative remarking of the (im)mortal hero that "now he is a star beside her in the heavens."[234]

A pivotal event in the sacred marriage rite saw the king being imbued with the luminous splendor or "glory" of the planet-goddess. This idea is evident in the following passage from the Old Babylonian hymn BM 96739, cited earlier:

[231] See the various myths discussed in *Ibid*., pp. 165-169.
[232] E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia, Part II," *op. cit*., p. 52. See also the discussion in H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 296-297.
[233] Pirjo Lapinkivi, *op. cit*., p. 27 writes: "The ascension of Dumuzi to heaven and his being stationed there as a star can also be understood as a consequence of the union." See also W. von Soden, *The Ancient Orient* (Grand Rapids, 1994), p. 68.
[234] C. Nimuendajú, "Íerente Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 57 (1944), p. 184.

"Oh Inanna, a husband worthy of your splendor has been granted to you…You, oh mistress, you have handed over to him your power as is due to a king, and Ama-ušumgal-anna causes a radiant brilliance to burst out for you."[235]

Françoise Bruschweiler, in her masterful analysis of the symbolism associated with Inanna/Venus, offered the following commentary on this particular hymn:

"This passage is interesting due to the way in which, in the context of a sacred marriage, the luminous essence of the goddess is passed over to King Ama-ußum-gal-anna, who is identified for the occasion with Dumuzi."[236]

It is our opinion that the mysterious event interpreted as Inanna/Venus conferring glory on Dumuzi—however it is to be understood from an astronomical standpoint—provides the historical prototype and logical rationale for understanding the archetypal myth of Star Woman. As Inanna/Venus was believed to confer power or "glory" on Dumuzi so, too, does Star Woman/Venus confer youth and beauty on her wretched paramour. In each case a sexual union with a Star Woman has a dramatically transforming effect, and in each case it is the Star's luminous efflux that transfigures the mortal hero. Thus, Dumuzi is empowered and shines brilliantly as a result of his marriage with Inanna/Venus. In the Star Woman myth, similarly, the previously ugly mortal is transformed into a beautiful youth and "shines" with luminous splendor as a result of sexual union with Venus. A narrative from South America, cited earlier, captures the essence of this extraordinary effusion of luminous splendor characterizing "union" with Star Woman:

"When she lay down with him there was a light emanating from her, illuminating every-thing…The light, or maybe her beauty, was transmitted to her parents-in-law and to the other people who were there every night …By now the other people and some girls were very envious

[235] Quoted from F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 110. For a slightly different translation, see J. Black et al., "A tigi to Inana (Inana E)," *ETCSL*, lines 21-24.
[236] *Ibid*., p. 111.

of the young man's family because they looked so fair and beautiful. The man used to be dark and ugly, but when he slept with Iozly every night he grew better and better looking until he was fair and handsome, with smooth, fair hair."[237]

It is as if Star Woman and Inanna enveloped their respective paramours with a splendor akin to St. Elmo's fire, thereby endowing them with extraordinary beauty and superhuman power.

But what does it mean that the planet Venus confers her "power" or luminous "splendor" on Dumuzi, the latter supposedly a mortal king? The key to the puzzling imagery, in our view, is to understand Dumuzi in his original context—as a planetary body set alongside Venus. Inanna's empowerment of Dumuzi/Mars is best understood as having reference to a spectacular conjunction between two planets, one in which Inanna/Venus was seen to crown Dumuzi/Mars with her luminous splendor (we will return to this theme in chapter eleven).

[237] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chamacoco Indians* (Los Angeles, 1987), pp. 85-86.

Interlude

"What is to be made of this mass of nonsense? How can all this have a meaning, a motivation, a function, or at least a structure? The question of whether myths have an authentic content can never be put in positive terms."[238]

An old adage proclaims that the devil is in the details. This could well serve as the motto for developing a science of mythology, for in comparing and analyzing myths it is the recurring and often incongruous details of structure and language which frequently betray affinities, historical contingencies, and significant informational content. In this sense the scientific study of mythology resembles nothing so much as comparative anatomy—the science of clarifying structural and functional affinities between different animals. To the expert eye, a few teeth, together with the odd fibula or femur, will reveal unequivocal signs of form and function, thereby aiding in the reconstruction of the entire animal and its probable way of life and phylogenetic history.

In the biological sciences in general, and in comparative anatomy in particular, it is the overarching theme of evolution that provides the historical framework and theoretical rationale for understanding how and why particular animals came to look the way they do. Embryonic whales occasionally display vestigial hip-sockets and hind limbs for one reason and one reason alone—because they formerly descended from land mammals.[239] Yet even a relatively informed and diligent observer of whales in the natural world could easily overlook this compelling evidence for evolution inasmuch as modern whales no longer display external hind limbs. Appearances notwithstanding, the anatomist's scalpel readily reveals the diminutive hip-sockets and limbs just the same. And as a testament to historical origins, one could hardly ask for more telltale evidence than the whale's vestigial structures.

[238] P. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths* (Chicago, 1988), p. 2.
[239] P. Gingerich, "Paleobiological Perspectives on Mesonychia, Archaeoceti, and the Origin of Whales," in J. Thewissen ed., *The Emergence of Whales* (New York, 1998), pp. 423-449.

And so it is with countless structures of ancient myth and ritual, wherein a seemingly anomalous mytheme stands out as if a "throwback" to a distant age, often in apparent contempt for context or a common sense understanding of the natural world. As a case in point, consider the myriad of mythological traditions which describe a hero's deadly combat with a giant dragon—this despite the fact that such creatures *do not exist* in the real world. In the course of the dragon-combat the hero is often swallowed whole, only to drill a fire in the monster's belly and emerge relatively unscathed several days later although the experience has rendered him bald. Such a tale was told of Heracles, for example, but analogous myths are to be found around the globe.[240] As bizarre as these traditions appear at first sight, comparative analysis will show that such motif-structures as the hero's ingurgitation, fire-drilling, and loss of hair are every bit as telling as the whale's vestigial hind limbs in revealing the historical origins—and celestial prototypes—of the warrior-hero archetype.

As the theory of evolution provides the explanatory concept whereby we can understand innumerable biological structures and behavioral patterns, it also allows biologists to reconstruct a prototypical "Ur-form" from which a particular species or order descended—this despite the fact that such a form has yet to be discovered in the extant paleontological record. Thus it is that "whales with legs" were postulated long before they were ever documented in the fossil record.

In the study of ancient myth, in contrast to the situation prevailing in the biological sciences, a unifying theory has yet to be advanced which can provide the necessary historical context and theoretical model whereby the world's vast corpus of mythological structures might be classified or understood. It is our opinion that the Saturn theory represents just such a unifying concept and, as such, constitutes an important breakthrough and methodological first step towards the desired goal of developing a science of mythology. And much as a thorough familiarity with the facts of anatomy and paleontology equips the biologist with the requisite knowledge to recognize the whale's fundamental affinity with other mammals, both living and long extinct, so, too, does a comprehensive knowledge of ancient lore enable the comparativist to discern underlying patterns shared between disparate sacred traditions—even those which, on the surface, would appear to bear little resemblance to each other.

[240] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 138-158.

In the study of ancient myth, as in evolutionary biology, there is simply no substitute for the comparative method. No matter how learned the scholar, and no matter how rigorous his reasoning, it is virtually impossible to understand the origins of a particular myth from the vantage point of one culture alone. The reason for this is perfectly obvious, although it seems to have gone largely unrecognized to date. Given the fact that myths have been told and retold for countless millennia, it stands to reason that each culture's mythological corpus has been affected by "mutations"; i.e., secondary accretions and embellishments which modify or otherwise distort its original message. If so, it follows that theoretical analyses based on the traditions of one particular culture alone are likely to be compromised or undermined by the "noise" emanating from these secondary mutations. Yet if analysis is focused primarily on those mythological structures (mythemes) that are found around the globe, one can be relatively confident that extraneous mutations can be recognized and controlled for analytical purposes. A comparative analysis thus lessens the likelihood of arriving at false conclusions due to the loss of basic structures or the faulty transmission or arbitrary contamination of the original myth. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the comparative analysis of analogous mythological structures—much like the comparative analysis of individual bones collected from different animals much separated in time and space—allows for the reconstruction of a prototypical Ur-myth from which the respective "daughter myths" have descended. This remains true even in those cases wherein a myth's original historical context may have been lost to a particular culture or region.

Given its apparent antiquity and wide range of distribution, the Star Woman myth constitutes an exemplary case study illustrating the theoretical rationale of comparative mythology. If the original myth can be represented by the alphabet—wherein the 26 letters constitute the myth's entire set of structural components or mythemes—the respective extant versions can be symbolized as follows: ABC1, DEF2, ACF3, MOP4, etc. While no one version preserves the entire mythological repertoire, a comparative analysis of the attested versions will allow for the isolation and recovery of the various structural components and this, in turn, will point us towards the myth's original form (i.e., A-Z). Through comparative analysis it will eventually become evident which structural components constitute mutations and/or arbitrary developments

(represented here by the respective numerals), as when a particular tribe in South America identifies Star Woman as Jupiter rather than Venus.[241] Upon isolating the various structures and thematic patterns shared by different narratives, and culling out the secondary accretions, it should be possible to reconstruct the original myth *and its natural historical origins*.

Ideally, a scientific analysis of the Star Woman theme will seek to understand the various local versions by reference to the myth's original structure (A-Z) and natural-historical context. The secondary accretions, in turn, will generally be ignored as "noise," much as paleontologists ignore genetic anomalies or injuries in their attempt to reconstruct the prototypical "whale." By proceeding in this manner, it should be possible to place the respective local versions in their original mytho-historical context even though that context has been otherwise largely obscured.

Such an approach stands in marked contrast to that practiced by other schools of mythological exegesis, which all too often become bogged down in the analysis of secondary mutations and therefore fail to recognize the archetypal mythological structures and thematic patterns. Especially guilty in this regard is Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose arcane method of analysis considers each particular version of a myth to be equally valid and informative.[242] This is a classic example of mistaking the individual trees and attendant undergrowth for the proverbial forest, and thus it is little wonder that Lévi-Strauss ended up advancing such absurdities as the following dictum: "myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him."[243]

The primary goal of comparative mythological analysis is, or ought to be, the reconstruction of the historical determinants behind the genesis of a particular mythological structure—the so-called mythemes. In this way—and in this way only—in our opinion, will it be possible to decipher the information encoded in ancient mythological traditions. If the thesis developed here has any validity, it follows that the world's treasure-trove of myth and ritual will contain innumerable references to planetary catastrophe, many of which survive as mere vestiges and isolated reminiscences. Like the rudimentary hind limbs of embryonic whales, such mnemonic "throwbacks" represent compelling evidence of structures that originated in a specific historical

[241] C. Nimuendajú, "Íerenté Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 57 (1944), p. 184.
[242] C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in T. Sebeok, *Myth: A Symposium* (London, 1955), p. 92.
[243] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York, 1995), p. 3.

context and once served a functional purpose, now barely recognizable and devoid of function. Inanna's marriage with Dumuzi is but one of thousands of such vestigial mythological structures.

Aphrodite and Phaethon

"We sing to honor Zeus' daughter in the sky, mistress of loves, wedding maker for maiden-girls, Aphrodite. Mistress, for you I sing this bridal song, Cyprus [sic] most beautiful of the gods, and for your boy newly-wed whom you hide in heaven, offspring of your marriage; you who will make the marriage for the great king of this city, our ruler dear to the starry golden place! Aphrodite!"[244]

Hesiod and Pausanias both tell of a liaison between Aphrodite and a *dáimõn* named Phaethon. In their all-too-brief accounts Phaethon is described as a youthful paramour of Aphrodite's, whisked away to heaven to serve as an attendant in the goddess's temple. This tradition is of utmost interest here because it shares several motifs in common with the Star Woman theme. The relevant passage from the *Theogony* reads as follows:

"And to Cephalus she [Eos] bare a splendid son, strong Phaethon, a man like the gods, whom, when he was a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit."[245]

As Aphrodite's beloved, Phaethon bears a certain resemblance to the aged ferryman Phaon. Indeed, Gregory Nagy adduced a number of thematic parallels between Hesiod's Phaethon and Phaon. The names of the two heroes are similar in meaning, both signifying "the bright" or "shining." And much as Aphrodite hid Phaon in order to keep him for herself so, too, did Phaethon meet with a similar fate: "Since the epithet *múkhios* of Phaethon in Theogony 991 implies that he was hidden by Aphrodite, we see here an important parallelism with Phaon and Adonis, who were also hidden by Aphrodite."[246]

[244] Fragment from Euripides' *Phaethon* 227-244 as translated by R. Rosenzweig, *Worshipping Aphrodite* (Ann Arbor, 2004), p. 68.
[245] *Theogony* 986-991 as translated by H. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Homerica* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 153.
[246] G. Nagy, *op. cit*., p. 172 quoting Fragment 211 LP.

Phaethon's pronounced beauty, capable of enticing even the goddess of enticement herself, constitutes an important clue pointing towards his original identity as the mythical Morning Star is everywhere renowned for his resplendent handsomeness (such traditions reflect the Star's appearance *after* his magical transformation from the sore-laden phase, needless to say). Thus it is that the Blackfoot Indians of North America, like the Sikuani of South America, remember Morning Star as a "young man with a beautiful face"[247] and as the "handsomest person" ever.[248] Analogous traditions are attested in the Old World as well. Thus, in Chinese lore the Morning Star is described as "a very handsome young man."[249]

The mythographer Hyginus, in his account of the "contest" between Phaethon and Aphrodite—the goddess known as "most beautiful of the gods"—alludes to the proverbial beauty of the male Morning Star:

"The fourth star is that of Venus…Some have said it represents the son of Aurora and Cephalus, who surpassed many in beauty, so that he even vied with Venus, and, as Eratosthenes says, for this reason it is called the star of Venus."[250]

In addition to echoing the aforementioned Sikuani tradition describing the Morning Star as the "handsomest man in the world," Hyginus's description of Phaethon recalls Kratinos's testimony that Phaon was the most beautiful man on earth.

In Aphrodite's "kidnapping" of the *dáimõn* Phaethon, moreover, we would recognize a structural analogue to the Toba myth wherein Star Woman carries off her mortal paramour. In both cases the planet Venus is involved in a sexual relationship with a mortal youth and whisks him off to heaven. A very similar scenario is evident in the traditions surrounding Inanna's dalliance with Dumuzi in ancient Mesopotamia, wherein the planet-goddess "marries" the mortal king and installs him in heaven alongside her.

[247] W. McClintock, *Old Indian Trails* (Boston, 1913), p. 236.
[248] G. Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* (New York, 1912), p. 98. Of the Plains Indians, Alice Kehoe, "Ethnoastronomy of the North American Plains," in V. Del Chamberlain et al eds., *Songs From the Sky* (West Sussex, 2005), p. 127 notes a "wide repetition" of such ideas "as Morning Star as a handsome, virile young man."
[249] Y. Ke, *Dragons and Dynasties* (London, 1993), p. 32.
[250] *Poetica astronomica* II.42 in M. Grant, *The Myths of Hyginus* (Lawrence, 1960), pp. 227ff.

An interesting parallel to Hesiod's account of Phaethon can be found amongst the sacred traditions from North America. In the latter two decades of the 19th century, Harriet Maxwell Converse collected an important corpus of myths from the Seneca in upper New York. One myth describes the catasterization of a mortal hunter named Sosondowah who, once upon a time, pursued a giant elk into the sky. Shortly thereafter he started free-falling back towards earth, only to be rescued by Dawn: "But Dawn, pitying the sky stranger, rescued him as he was falling, and carrying him to her lodge in the east sky, created him her sentinel to guard its door."[251]

As Phaethon, the son of Dawn, is held captive by Aphrodite and made to serve as the "keeper" of her celestial temple so, too, is Sosondowah held captive by Dawn and made to serve as the doorkeeper of her lodge. The resemblance between the two traditions is quite remarkable. The primary difference is that Hesiod makes Aphrodite the mortal's captor, while the Seneca assign this role to Dawn. Here it would appear that the Amerindian tradition has become fragmented, with the result that the role otherwise associated with Star Woman/Venus has become partially displaced to the Dawn.[252] That said, the relationship between the mortal hunter and the planet Venus was not forgotten altogether, as evidenced by the fact that the Seneca make Venus, as Star Woman, share Dawn's lodge:

"Looking down, he [the hunter] beheld and loved a mortal maiden; in the spring he descended to her under the form of a bluebird;…in the autumn, under the guise of a giant nighthawk, he bore her to the skies. But Dawn, angered at his delay, bound him before her door, and transforming the maiden into a star set her above his forehead, where he must long for her throughout all time without attaining her. The name of the star-maiden, which is the Morning Star, is Gendenwitha, 'It Brings the Day.'"[253]

Thus it is that, as the "doorkeeper" of Dawn's lodge, the captive mortal hunter is placed in the immediate proximity of Venus, the latter specifically described as a Star Woman. (In *Martian*

[251] H. Converse, *Myths and Legends of the New York Iroquois* (Albany, 1974), p. 61.
[252] Interestingly, classicists have proposed a similar inversion in Greek lore, postulating that Aphrodite has inherited the traditions originally associated with Dawn. See here the discussion in D. Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 64-84.
[253] H. Alexander, "North American," in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), p. 26.

Metamorphoses we documented that the planet Mars was conceptualized as the doorkeeper of heaven—a theme we will revisit in chapter ten).

In addition to clarifying the astronomical content encoded within Hesiod's account of Phaethon—wherein Aphrodite represents the planet Venus—this Seneca tradition complements the Star Woman narratives from South America and confirms our suspicion that the mortal paramour is a star himself, one separate and distinct from the planet Venus. That said, the Seneca tradition preserves yet another mytheme of direct interest to our present inquiry—it is reported that the celestial doorkeeper is in constant danger of being incinerated by Venus:

"The star [Venus] holds a torch; should the hunter try to escape, the fire will consume him. Thus, the hunter must forever yearn for the maiden, Star Woman, whom he cannot see and who has never known him. It is said that before the Sun appears on the horizon, he lights his council fire by the torch of Star Woman…"[254]

Star Woman's "torch" recalls the fact that the torch is everywhere considered a special attribute of the planet Venus; thus, Venus is described as a "torch-star" in Mesopotamian lore,[255] as also in North America.[256] The connection between Venus's "torch" and the lighting of the sun's fire, in turn, recalls the Skidi report that the sun lit his fire from the bed of flint whereupon the planet Mars resided as the mythical Morning Star. Indeed, there is much reason to believe that the two traditions are simply variations upon a common theme and that Mars' "bed of flint" is to be identified with Venus's "torch." If so, it is probable that the myth of the Seneca hunter's catasterization alongside Venus's "torch" has reference to a conjunction of planets and thus represents a much-embellished parallel to the marriage of Venus and Mars in Skidi lore.

The fact that the Seneca Venus is represented as a threat to incinerate her mortal paramour is of direct relevance to the present study because South American narratives describe the mortal hero

[254] D. Miller, *Stars of the First People* (Boulder, 1997), p. 52 citing Converse.
[255] In the Iddin-Dagan hymn, as elsewhere.
[256] Thus, the Chilcotin of British Columbia described Venus as "the old woman with a torch." See D. Miller, *op. cit*., p. 81.

as being scorched as a result of his interaction with Star Woman. Witness the following Mocovi narrative:

"There is a big star in the sky that can be seen at dawn. They say it is a beautiful woman. One day, while the young men were sleeping, the star fell from the sky. She met a handsome young man. It was a cold night and she had a fire. However, she told the man: 'Don't touch that piece of live coal. Don't touch the fire.' The man got up and touched it and was burned. The star went back up to into the sky, but she told him: 'I'll come again tomorrow, and I'll come every day because I want to marry you.' The morning star told him: 'Even if you feel cold, don't touch the fire.' He did nevertheless. When he felt cold, he picked it up and burned himself. Then he died."[257]

A Toba narrative, excerpts of which were quoted earlier, makes the mortal hero suffer incineration as a result of Venus's hearth:

"A very poor man who was covered with scabs was liked by nobody because of his disease. But the morning star, a woman who lives in the sky and who uses two mortars to pound algarroba, felt sorry for him, descended to the earth, and carried him to the sky. The scabbed man could not bear the extreme cold up there, but the woman told him not to poke the fire burning in a large hearth or he would melt. But when he could no longer stand the cold he had to poke the fire, and he died. The woman took a bag, put the bones in it, and threw them down to earth."[258]

In light of our hypothesis that the sore-laden mortal is to be identified with the mythical "Morning Star"—and thus with the planet Mars—it is significant to find that various cultures describe the former star as having suffered incineration at one point or another. The Aztec Quetzalcoatl, who was cremated on a great funeral pyre, offers the classic example in this regard. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, composed around 1570, provides a much-embellished version of this famous myth:

[257] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Mocovi Indians* (Los Angeles, 1988), p. 45.
[258] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Toba Indians, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 61-62.

"They say that in the year One Reed, having arrived at the sacred shores of the holy sea, he stopped and wept. Then he gathered up his vestments and dressed himself for a ceremony, putting on his robes of quetzal feathers and his turquoise mask. When he was finished dressing, he immediately set himself on fire, and was consumed by the flames. For this reason the place where Quetzalcoatl was burned is called Tlatlayan (Burning Place). And it is said that as he burned, his ashes rose, and all the precious birds appeared, rising and circling in the skies:…When the ashes were gone, at that moment, the heart of Quetzalcoatl rose upward. They knew he had risen into the sky and entered the heavens. The old ones say that he became the star that appears at dawn. They say that it appeared when Quetzalcoatl died, and because of this they named him Lord of the Dawn."[259]

As the Lord of the Dawn, or Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, Quetzalcoatl is identifiable with the mythical Morning Star.

Quetzalcoatl's self-immolation is described in other post-conquest documents as well. Henry Nicholson summarized the different accounts as follows: "In most of the versions in which he dies, he is cremated and his soul ascends to heaven and becomes the Morning Star."[260]

Quetzalcoatl himself, moreover, was described as being grotesquely ugly, with "warts" or sores all over his face.[261] Ritual celebrations emphasized the god's pathetic appearance. Thus, Duran describes a comic dance at Quetzalcoatl's feast featuring "a man swollen with tumors, feigning to be sorely afflicted by them, moaning over the pains he felt."[262] As to the serious nature of the mimetic dances in question, Duran had no doubt: "All these native farces were highly amusing and pleasant, but were not acted out without pagan meaning, for they stemmed from the fact that the god Quetzalcoatl was held to be the advocate for tumors, eye disease, colds, and coughing."[263]

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[259] Translation by David Johnson, "Quetzalcóatl: Myth, Legend and History," in R. Anaya, *Lord of the Dawn* (Albuquerque, 1987), p. 14.
[260] H. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in G. Ekholm & I. Bernal eds., *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica* (Austin, 1971), p. 429.
[261] H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder, 2001), p. 42.
[262] Fray Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites* (Norman, 1971), p. 135.
[263] *Ibid*., p. 135.

In this context it is significant to note that, to this very day, the Zinacantecan Indians of Mesoamerica associate the planet Mars with diseases of the eyes.[264] The Lukungun Indians of Vancouver Island, similarly, describe the planet Mars as having "sick" eyes.[265]

Yet as was the case with Morning Stars everywhere, Quetzalcoatl could also assume a more pleasant appearance. Thus the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* describes the costuming of the god-man as follows:

"He made him first a dress of quetzal feathers that crossed him from the shoulder to the waist. Then he made him his turquoise mask, and took red dye, with which he reddened his lips…then he drew in his teeth as if they were serpent's, and made his wig and his beard of blue feathers and of red guacamaya feathers…; and when all that finery was made, he gave Quetzalcoatl the mirror. When he looked at himself, he saw that he was very beautiful…"[266]

[264] E. Hunt, *The Transformation of the Hummingbird* (Ithaca, 1977), pp. 144-145. See also the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1977), pp. 159-184 where additional examples are given linking Mars to eye disease.
[265] F. Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America* (Vancouver, 2002), p. 171.
[266] Quoted from L. Séjourné, *Burning Water* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 132.

The Morning Star in Australia

Australia was "discovered" by Captain Cook in 1770. At the time, Cook had no idea that a significant population of indigenous peoples occupied the continent, estimated to have then exceeded 750,000 individuals. Once the continent was settled by Europeans, it did not take long for the newcomers to wipe out the vast majority of the Aboriginal population. By the nineteenth century, at which point anthropologists earnestly set about collecting the sacred lore of the respective nomadic tribes, the population had dwindled to some ten thousand individuals. It is simply impossible to estimate the wealth of traditional knowledge lost as a result of this genocidal holocaust. The few remnants of astronomical lore that have survived suggest that the loss was very substantial indeed.

The Morning Star features prominently in Aboriginal lore. The following tradition from New South Wales describes its incineration during that primeval period known as Dreamtime:

"Mullyan the eagle hawk built himself and all his relations a nest at the top of a very high Yarran tree where he lived apart from his tribe. The eagle hawk was a cannibal and hunted men with an enormous spear, taking their bodies back to the tree to be cooked and eaten by himself and his women. Friends of the dead men determined to find out where they had disappeared to and managed to follow Mullyan's tracks right to the foot of the huge tree, but it was too tall and straight for them to climb. The men decided to call the Bibbees, famous climbers, to help them. The Bibbees went to the Yarran tree and started at once. There was only light enough that first night for them to see to reach a fork in the tree about half way up, where they camped. In the morning they saw Mullyan fly off and climbed up to his camp. Hiding a smoldering stick in one corner of the camp, they went quietly down again. The people below were pleased at the plan to burn out Mullyan and moved away from the tree in case it should fall. When Mullyan came home, tired after an unsuccessful day hunting, he threw down his spear on the corner of his camp and suddenly the fire from below burnt through, and burnt up Mullyan and all his relations.

Their charred bones fell to the ground, but Mullyan went to live in the sky as the Morning Star."[267]

Elsewhere in Australia the planet Mars is described as having suffered the same fate as Mullyan, much as we would expect if the mythical "Morning Star" were the red planet. Thus the Bunurong tribe of Victoria relates the following tale of the fire-bringing hero Toordt:

"Toordt returned to his home in the sky and never came back to the blacks. They say he was burnt to death on a mountain named Mun-ni o, where he had kindled a fire to keep alive the small quantity he had procured. But some of the sorcerers deny that he was burnt to death on that mountain; they maintain that for his good deeds Pund-jel changed him into the fiery star which white men call the planet Mars."[268]

It is doubtless no coincidence that the Bunurong, like the Skidi Pawnee, remember the planet Mars as a driller of fire. In fact, as we noted in a previous chapter, the Aborigines identified the red planet as the prototypical fire-drill

[267] J. Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming, 40,000 years of Australian History* (Sydney, 1980), p. 154.
[268] J. Frazer, *Myths of the Origin of Fire* (London, 1930), p. 17.

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Melqart

A recurring motif in the Star Woman cycle of myths finds the mortal paramour being "rejuvenated" or beautified as a result of cremation or incineration. Recall the Papuan tradition, quoted earlier:

"The Papuans of Geelvink Bay, on the northern coast of Dutch New Guinea, tell of an old man who used to earn his living by selling the intoxicating juice of the sago-palm. But to his vexation he often found that the vessels, which he had set overnight to catch the dripping juice of the tapped palms, were drained dry in the morning. As the people in his village denied all knowledge of the theft, he resolved to watch, and was lucky enough to catch the thief in the very act, and who should the thief be but the Morning Star? To ransom herself from his clutches she bestowed on him a magical stick or wand, the possession of which ensured to its owner the fulfillment of every wish. In time the old man married a wife, but she was not pleased that her husband was so old and so covered with scabs. So one day he resolved to give her a joyful surprise by renewing his youth with the help of his magic wand. For this purpose he retired into the forest and kindled a great fire of iron-wood. When the flames blazed up he flung himself among the glowing embers, and immediately his shriveled skin peeled off, and all the scabs were turned into copper trinkets, beautiful corals, and gold and silver bracelets. He himself came forth from the fire a handsome young man."[269]

The rejuvenation of the Papuan hero by means of fire recalls a widespread mythical theme we have termed the Melqart-motif.[270] Here a god or hero is subjected to cremation or boiling in order to become rejuvenated, cured of some affliction, immortalized, or otherwise empowered. The motif is named after the ancient Phoenician god Melqart, who was cremated in Tyrian ritual.

[269] J. Frazer, *Apollodorus: The Library, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 361.
[270] *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 45-50.

Originally native to Tyre and coastal Canaan, Melqart's cult spread with Phoenician colonizing ventures throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Prominent in Northern Africa and Spain, the god's cult is attested as far North as Britain.[271] Yet despite his popularity and wide province, precious few details have been preserved about the god in question. Indeed, scholars have lamented that "Melqart's personality eludes research."[272] This relative dearth of evidence is a reflection, in part, of the circumstance that very little remains of the once extensive Phoenician literature.

Much of our information about Melqart's cult comes from Greek and Christian writers.[273] According to the Pseudo-Clementines, people used to speak of a place near Tyre where Melqart had been consumed in flames.[274] Representations of the god at Pyrgi show him enveloped in flames.[275] From Menander by way of Josephus, we learn that Hiram, a renowned king of Tyre mentioned in the Old Testament account of Solomon, erected a temple to Melqart and his consort Astarte in the tenth century BCE.[276] From the same source we learn that it was a practice every spring to celebrate the "awakening" of Melqart.[277] Although the nature of the Tyrian rite remains obscure, it appears to have involved a rejuvenation of the god through cremation—hence Nonnos's testimony that Melqart resembles the Phoenix in that he "sheds old age in the fire, and from the fire takes in exchange the youthful bloom."[278]

That the Phoenicians themselves believed that Melqart had been resurrected from the dead is apparent. Thus, ancient texts designate a member of his cult personnel as "the raiser of the god," presumably a reference to his resurrection.[279] Especially interesting are the literary hints suggesting that the god's resurrection occurred in conjunction with his marriage to the goddess

[271] R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996), p. 169.
[272] J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1979), p. 112.
[273] For a summary of the available evidence see S. Ribichini, "Melqart," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 1053-1058.
[274] *Recogn. Clem*. X, 24, P.G. 1, 1434 as cited in R. de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, 1971), p. 250.
[275] W. Burkert, "Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels," in J. Bremmer ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (Totowa, N.J., 1989), p. 36.
[276] *Antiquities*, 8:5:3; contra *Apionem* 1, 17f.
[277] W. Burkert, *op. cit*., p. 36, citing Menander, *Fragment* 783 F 1.
[278] *Dionysiaka* XL:398. See the discussion in S. Langdon, "Semitic Mythology," in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (New York, 1964), p. 52.
[279] M. Smith, "The death of 'dying and rising gods' in the Biblical world," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998), p. 278.

Astarte. Mark Smith, in a review of the "dying gods" controversy, offered the following observation with respect to the aforementioned title *Mqmœlm*, "the raiser of the god": "In some cases the title appears in apposition with 'the title *mtrh 'strny*, <Astartean bridegroom>, alluding in all likelihood to a function of the *hieros gamos*."[280]

Sirgio Ribichini has speculated that the god's resurrection was a direct result of his marriage with Astarte. He would view Melqart as a Tyrian variant of Adonis:

"Other references in classical literature inform us about this annual festival, which from many points of view recalls analogous cultic situations in honour of other dying and rising gods (cf. Adonis and Eshmun). It was probably the greatest festival of Melqart: the god, burnt with fire, as the Greek hero [Heracles], was brought to life by means of a hierogamic rite with his divine partner Astarte, through the participation of a particular celebrant, the *mqm œlm*, 'awakener of deity'…The myth runs parallel to this rite, describing the god's disappearance and return (Athenaeus IX 392 D and Zenobius, *Cent*. V 56)."[281]

How, then, are we to understand the god on the pyre who doubled as the bridegroom of Astarte/Venus? In Assyrian texts from the first millennium BCE, Melqart is identified with the Babylonian god Nergal.[282] His identification with Nergal supports the hypothesis that Melqart personified the planet Mars. The fact that Arab chroniclers speak of the Tyrian sanctuary as being especially consecrated to the red planet points to the same conclusion.[283]

[280] *Ibid*. It should be noted here that other scholars have interpreted the phrase to mean "arouser of the god who is the husband of Astronoe [i.e., Astarte]." See here R. de Vaux, *op cit*., p. 248.
[281] S. Ribichini, *op. cit*., col. 1055.
[282] H. Seyrig, "Antiquités Syriennes," *Syria* 64 (1944-45), p. 70. See also S. Ribichini, *op. cit*., col. 1053.
[283] H. Seyrig, *op. cit*., p. 70. See also J. Hjärpe, *Analyse Critique des Traditions Arabes sur les Sabéens Harraniens* (Uppsala, 1972), p. 75.

The Latin God Mars

As I have documented elsewhere, Mars-gods are typically associated with fire and often linked to rites of cremation or boiling.[284] The Skidi Mars, it will be remembered, was described as standing on a hot bed of flint, the latter comprising "the one great source of fire whence the sun gets his light." The Latin god Mars was represented as having received a "baptism" of fire at the hands of Minerva (see figure one).[285] This scene, which appears on a Praenestan cista dating to the fourth century BCE and has close parallels in Etruscan mirrors of the following century, has generated much discussion. Wilhelm Roscher, followed by Hendrik Versnel, saw in it a "rejuvenation" of Mars and compared the cista's imagery to the magical rejuvenation experienced by Jason in Medea's cauldron.[286] Others, such as Georges Dumézil, interpreted the scene as an initiation rite: "Probably we are concerned here with scenes of initiation…into warfare."[287]

[284] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 24-25, 45-50.
[285] See the discussion of H. Wagenvoort, "The Origin of the Ludi Saeculares," in *Studies in Roman Literature, Culture and Religion* (New York, 1978), pp. 212-232.
[286] W. Roscher, "Mars," *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884-1937), col. 2408. On Jason's rejuvenation, see the scholiast to Aristophanes' *Knights* 1321; scholiast to Lycophron 1315. See also the discussion in J. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* (New Hyde Park, 1961) p. 181. With regards to the many interpretations offered, H. Versnel, "Apollo and Mars One Hundred Years after Roscher," *Visible Religion* 4 (1986), p. 147 writes: "The most attractive seem to be those which connect the immersion with death and rebirth, or rejuvenation." See also L.B. van der Meer, "Maris' birth, life and death on two Etruscan Mirrors," *BA Besch* 63 (1988), p. 123, who writes: "The first meaning of the volute krater at Bolsena must have been funerary. This means that Maris husrnana is intended to be reborn from death."
[287] G. Dumezil, *Archaic Roman Religion, Vol. 1* (Baltimore, 1966), p. 244.

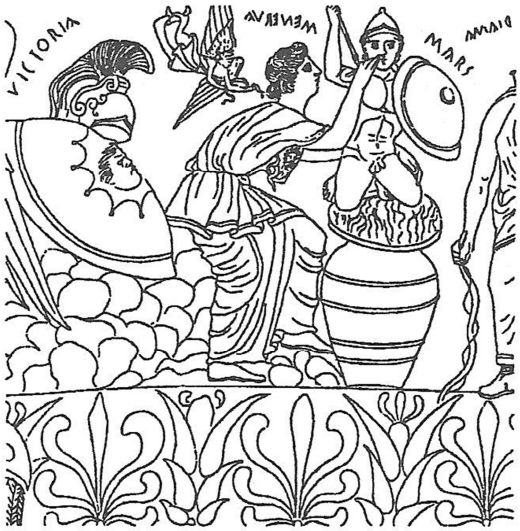

Figure one

Additional insight into the scene on the Praenestine cista is provided by a story told by Aelianus (*Var. Hist*. 9, 16), himself of Praenestine origin. Wagenvoort's commentary on Aelian is most relevant here:

"According to Aelianus Mares dies at the age of 123, i.e. at the end of an Etruscan *saeculum*, but he comes to life again. If we are right in supposing him to be identical with Mars, then the Etruscans must have made him, in imitation of Greek and Oriental nature gods, into a dying and resuscitated divinity: each saeculum stands therefore under the sway of a new Mars (the ritual with the vessel of boiling water may also remind us of a rejuvenating process…in which case Mars did not die but was changed from a senile greybeard a the end of the period into a baby boy)."[288]

In short, the remarkable scene on the Praenestan cista raises the distinct possibility of a connection between the rejuvenated child in the boiling cauldron and the planet Mars—provided, that is, that one can accept the identity of the Latin god with the planet of the same name.[289]

[288] H. Wagenvoort, *op. cit*., p. 230.
[289] On the Martian origins of the Latin god, see E. Cochrane, Martian *Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 27-35.

Demophon

The Mars-imagery on the Praenestan cista calls to mind the Greek myth of Demophon. Demeter's attempt to secure immortality and strength for the infant by roasting him in fire is most famous from the description in the Homeric Hymn to that goddess:

"She nurtured him in the palace, and he grew up like a *dáimõn*, not eating food, not sucking from the breast…She used to anoint him with ambrosia, as if he had been born of the goddess, and she would breathe down her sweet breath on him as she held him at her bosom. At nights she would conceal him within the *ménos* of fire, as if he were a smoldering log, and his parents were kept unaware. But they marveled at how full in bloom he came to be, and to look at him was like looking at the gods."[290]

There are several intriguing thematic parallels between the Demophon tradition and the Star Woman theme as reflected in the cult of Aphrodite. As Nagy noted, the child's very name betrays a certain affinity to Phaon—witness the archaic spelling Demophaon.[291] Nor is it without interest that Demophon, like the Hesiodic Phaethon, is described as a *dáimõn* beloved by the goddess. Note also that Demeter's charge, like Phaethon, is described in floral terms—as being in full "bloom." And as Nagy pointed out, it is probable that Demeter's "concealment" of the boy-*dáimõn* offers a thematic parallel to Aphrodite's "hiding" of Phaon and Phaethon.

[290] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 235-241 as translated in G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 181-182.
[291] *Ibid*., p. 182.

Melikertes

With Mars and Demophon one must also group together the child-hero Melikertes, whose name has often been viewed as a Greek reflex of Melqart.[292] Apollodorus reports that Ino-Leukothea, upon being stricken with a terrible madness, plunged Melikertes into a cauldron of boiling water and leapt into the sea with the infant.[293] According to Pausanias, Ino's suicidal leap took place from a white rock named Molouris.[294]

Ino's affinity with Aphrodite is commonly acknowledged, some scholars viewing her as a hypostasis of *Urania*.[295] This being the case, it is significant to note that Ptolemaios Chennos (ca. 100 CE) makes Aphrodite herself the first to dive off the white rock out of love for the dead Adonis.[296] Yet as Nagy noted, a very similar tradition surrounds Phaon. Thus, a fragment from a lost play of Menander's entitled *The Leukadia*, "the white rock," describes the famous poet Sappho as emulating Aphrodite's tragic leap:

"Where they say that Sappho was the first, hunting down the proud Phaon, to throw herself, in her goading desire, from the rock that shines afar."[297]

The peculiar traditions surrounding the luminous white rock hint at a certain affinity between Phaon and Melikertes (and Adonis, for that matter). As for how we are to understand these fragmentary traditions, Nagy was doubtless right to suggest a celestial precedent:

"In the poetics of Sappho, the Indo-European model of the Morning Star and Evening Star merges with the Near Eastern model of the Planet Aphrodite. On the one hand, Sappho's

[292] M. Astour, *Hellenosemitica* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 204-212.
[293] 3:4:3.
[294] I.44.7.
[295] L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, *Vol. II* (New Rochelle, 1977), pp. 637-638. See also the discussion in H. Güntert, *Kalypso* (Halle, 1919), pp. 190-191.
[296] See the discussion in G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 229.
[297] *Ibid*., p. 227, citing Menander F 258K as preserved in Strabo 10.2.9. C452.

Hesperos is a nuptial star, as we know directly from the fragment 104 V…Since Hesperos is the evening aspect of the astral Aphrodite, its setting into the horizon, beyond which is Okeanos, could have inspired the image of a plunging Aphrodite…From Menander F 258K, we infer that Sappho spoke of herself as diving from the White Rock, crazed with love for Phaon. The implications of this image are cosmic. The 'I' of Sappho's poetry is vicariously projecting her identity into the goddess Aphrodite, who loves the native Lesbian hypostasis of the Sun-god himself [Phaon]. By diving from the White Rock, the 'I' of Sappho does what Aphrodite does in the form of the Evening Star, diving after the sunken Sun in order to retrieve him, another morning, in the form of the Morning Star."[298]

Our analysis agrees with that of Nagy insofar as we would trace the myth of Aphrodite and Phaon to the interstellar affairs of the planet Venus. We differ from Nagy in that we would identify Phaon with the planet Mars rather than with the Sun. As Phaon is intimately associated with a suicidal leap at the White Rock so, too, is Melicertes, the latter of whom is most likely a "humanized" hypostasis of the Phoenician god Melqart. That Aphrodite's leap from Molouris was elsewhere ascribed to her grief for Adonis suggests a fundamental affinity between the youthful hero and Phaon. And as Phaon shares his name with Demophaon so, too, does the latter share a fiery fête with Melqart and the Latin god Mars. The celestial prototype for such traditions, in our opinion, was the "cremation" of the mythical Morning Star, understood here as the planet Mars.

[298] *Ibid*., pp. 258-259.

The Cheyenne Morning Star

"Myth is by nature a conservative medium; symbolic images survive in late versions, where they may be given a completely new role or left incongruously opposed to the new context."[299]

Originally native to the lower Mississippi Valley region, the Cheyenne immigrated to the Great Plains region around 1800. At the time of the European's arrival, the tribe numbered in the tens of thousands and controlled an area spanning over a million acres, from the Upper Rockies in Montana well into Canada. By the turn of the 19th century they were reduced to some 3000 members. The Cheyenne currently reside on reservations in Montana and Oklahoma.

George Grinnell, the anthropologist primarily responsible for recording the Cheyenne lore, observed that their Creation accounts were frequently intertwined with narratives describing the adventures of the culture hero:

"The chronological arrangement of the stories of a people without written literature presents many difficulties, which are, of course, met with in the Cheyenne stories. In the order of such tales the first would naturally be the creation story, and soon after this the culture-hero story would follow. It is impossible, however, to be certain of the order of any of these tales."[300]

The hero credited with bringing the instruments of culture to the Cheyenne was known as Motseyoef, conventionally translated as "Sweet-Medicine."[301] Among the many skills he is alleged to have introduced was how to produce fire by means of a fire-drill.[302] The same hero was also celebrated for leading the Cheyenne to their ultimate homeland.[303] Prior to that they had lived in the distant North:

[299] D. Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* (Princeton, 1980), p. 11.
[300] G. Grinnell, "Some Early Cheyenne Tales," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 20 (1907), p. 170.
[301] G. Grinnell, "Some Early Cheyenne Tales. II," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 21 (1908), p. 269.
[302] G. Grinnell, "Some Early Cheyenne Tales," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 20 (1907), p. 171.
[303] R. Schukies, *Red Hat* (Hamburg, 1993), p. 35.

"Motseyoef, the one we call Sweet Medicine, he brought everything to our people, the Arrows, all the ceremonies, the food, everything we have. First the people lived way up north on the ice. When they started going south, a woman was leading them. They came to a place where two twigs were sticking out of the ice…The people went on and M. was leading them."[304]

A narrative recorded by the anthropologist Renate Schukies tells of the hero's stellar genealogy. It seems that Motseyoef's mother was a mortal who, once upon a time, was suddenly smitten by a beautiful star. As fate would have it, the young woman eventually succeeded in marrying the star and wound up living in heaven. Shortly thereafter the woman was warned by her Star husband not to dig in the celestial potato patch. Motseyoef's mother promptly ignored this prohibition and uprooted a potato, thereby revealing a hole in the celestial canopy that provided a bird's-eye view of her former campsite on Earth. Now hopelessly homesick, she resolved to return to Earth and forthwith set about preparing a long rope with which to descend. In her subsequent descent from the sky along the rope, however, the now pregnant woman fell to her death:

"So she dropped, she hit the ground. When she hit the ground, the baby came out, so far in the air. This little boy was Motseyoef."[305]

In the days to follow the child grew with amazing rapidity and soon proved to be a great warrior. Upon reaching adulthood, and having performed numerous heroic feats, Motseyoef married the daughter of the chief. Alas, the warrior-hero eventually rode off into the proverbial sunset, promising to return one day:

"When Motseyoef left the Cheyennes, he turned into the Morning Star. But Motseyoef told his people that he would come back one day."[306]

The biography of the Cheyenne Morning Star is of interest here because it conforms to a widespread pattern associated with the mythical Morning Star. Like Morning Stars everywhere,

[304] *Ibid*.
[305] *Ibid*., p. 37.
[306] *Ibid*., p. 43.

Motseyoef is described as very handsome. One narrative provides the following portrait of the god: "He was tall and good-looking, and had long hair hanging loose way down his back."[307]

The resemblance between Motseyoef and the Skidi Morning Star is particularly close—so close, in fact, that scholars have suspected a possible intermingling of traditions between the Cheyenne and Skidi.[308] Like the Skidi Mars, Motseyoef is represented as a great warrior. And, as was the case with the Skidi Morning Star, Motseyoef is credited with drilling the first fire—a signature of Creation in various cultures.

Especially telling is the distinctive color ascribed to the Cheyenne Morning Star: It is said that "he was painted red all over."[309] Here, too, a precise parallel can be found in Skidi descriptions of the planet Mars: "The Morning Star is like a man; he is painted red all over."[310] It goes without saying that this description is perfectly appropriate for the planet Mars, known everywhere as the "red star."

Equally significant is the fact that Motseyoef had the power to periodically rejuvenate himself.[311] One tradition makes this a cyclical phenomenon:

"Motseyoef lived with them 445 winters. Every winter he would get older, springtime he would get younger again."[312]

A remarkable parallel to Motseyoef's capacity for rejuvenation can be found in the sacred beliefs surrounding the Guatemalan Morning Star. Known by the name of Santiago, after the Christian saint, it was said that the Star "sometimes *pone joven* (gets young) & sometimes *viejito* [old]."[313] Such traditions can't help but recall the magical rejuvenation experienced by Star Woman's

[307] G. Grinnell, "Some Early Cheyenne Tales: II," *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 21 (1908), p. 276.
[308] R. Schukies, *op. cit*., p. 198.
[309] G. Grinnell, op. cit., p. 290.
[310] H. Alexander, "North American," L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), p. 93, citing the Pawnee priest Tahirussawichi.
[311] G. Grinnell, *op. cit*., p. 303.
[312] R. Schukies, *op. cit*., p. 42.
[313] I. Íprajc, "The Venus-Maize Complex in the Mesoamerican World View: Part II," *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 24 (1993), p. 38.

mortal paramour in South American lore, not to mention Phaon's rejuvenation at the hands of Aphrodite. The rejuvenations experienced by Mars and Melqart are also relevant here.

Motseyoef's metamorphosis into the Morning Star upon leaving the Cheyenne, in turn, forms a striking parallel to the apotheosis experienced by the Aztec Quetzalcoatl.[314] It is to that god's cult that we now turn.

[314] Renate Schukies, *op. cit*., pp. 196-198 was the first to note the resemblance between the two Morning Stars, so far as I'm aware.

Quetzalcoatl

"After the sun, which they held as their principal god, they honored and worshipped a certain star (I could not learn which star this was) more than any other denizen of the heavens or earth, because they held it as certain that their god, Quezalcóvatl, the highest god of the Cholulans, when he died transformed into this star."[315]

Alternately described as the greatest of gods and the noblest of mortal kings, Quetzalcoatl's influence on the collective Psyche of the indigenous peoples of ancient Mexico can scarcely be overestimated. According to Friar Diego Duran, an early Spanish chronicler, "all the ceremonies and rites, building temples and altars…all these things imitated the ways of that holy man."[316] The enigmatic figure of Quetzalcoatl has fascinated scholars for centuries, not only because of its intrinsic interest but because it is obvious that a proper understanding of the god-man holds the key to a realistic reconstruction of Mexican religion, myth, and history.

The most authoritative survey of the traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl is that by Henry Nicholson. As Nicholson laments, the picture that gradually emerges from the various extant sources describing Mexico's most famous personage is far from consistent and presents the scholar with difficulties of interpretation at virtually every step:

"The documents, taken together, constitute a rich, fascinating, confused, and contradictory corpus, a remarkable mélange of intricately blended historical, legendary, and mythological elements…It seems unlikely that anything like a rigidly standardized version existed…Based, as indicated earlier, on narrative chants and/or epic poems, straight oral historical tradition, and pictorial histories, the epic saga of the great priest/ruler of the Toltecs, in the process of transmission over time, had doubtless been repeatedly revised, reorganized, embellished, cut, and even deliberately distorted for propagandistic purposes by the custodians of the historical and religious lore of the many polities whose ruling houses claimed some connection with legend-

[315] Las Casas (ca. 1484-1566) as quoted in A. Christenson, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 2003), p. 218.
[316] Quoted from D. Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (Chicago, 1982), p. 86.

thronged, imperial Tollan, widely recognized as the source of all 'legitimate' political power in Late Classic Central Mexico."[317]

The Franciscan friar Motolinia, writing in the period from 1536 and 1541, provided a useful summary of Quetzalcoatl's career. He emphasized the paradigmatic function of the god-man, recalled as the "first lord to sit on the throne" and revered as the divine model for rulers everywhere:

"From him, they say, descended the people of Colhua, the ancestors of Moteuczoma, lords of Mexico and Colhuacan. It is said that the Indians considered Quetzalcoatl one of their principal gods, calling him god of the air. Everywhere they erected innumerable temples in his honor, set up his image and painted his figure."[318]

Viceroy Mendoza, writing in 1541, observed that Quetzalcoatl had led a migration into Mexico from the North.[319] It was upon reaching Tollan, according to the Codex Vienna and other texts, that Quetzalcoatl assumed the throne and set about teaching the ancient Mexicans the verities of religion and culture. Modern scholars, taking such reports at face value, would make of Quetzalcoatl a Toltec polymath whose résumé of accomplishments would put Thomas Jefferson to shame. Witness the following eulogy offered by Herbert Spinden:

"Quetzalcoatl, perhaps the most remarkable figure in ancient American history, was emperor, artist, scientist, and humanist philosopher. He established orders of knighthood as well as the coronation ceremony used by the later Mexican kings. He developed the various industrial arts and built up a wide trade in cotton, cacao, and other products…Apotheosis being an idea strongly fixed among the Toltecs, Quetzalcoatl was deified as Ehecatl, God of Winds, on account of his support of the Mayan god of rainstorms, and for his astronomical work he was further identified as God of the Planet Venus."[320]

[317] H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder, 2001), pp. 247-249.
[318] Quoted from D. Carrasco, *op. cit*., p. 42.
[319] H. Nicholson, *op. cit*., p. 91, quoting the respective accounts of Viceroy Mendoza and Munoz Camargo.
[320] H. Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America* (New York, 1928), pp. 173-175.

In the *Leyenda de los Soles*, a Nahuatl document dating from around 1550, Quetzalcoatl (as Ce Acatl) is described as a dashing military leader and early ruler of Tollan. Upon relinquishing his throne and traveling to the city of the sun—Tlapallan—Quetzalcoatl "falls sick, dies, and is burned on a funeral pyre."[321]

It was Quetzalcoatl's cremation and subsequent apotheosis as the Morning Star that provided the central mystery of Mexican religion. At the same time, the god's return from death was eagerly awaited. According to a curious prophecy reported by Sahagún, it was believed Quetzalcoatl would return as a "young boy."[322] This idea was to have catastrophic consequences with the arrival of Cortez, who was greeted with open arms largely because Motecuhzoma assumed he was the great god returned from the land of the sun to reclaim his rightful throne.

The *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* (ca. 1530), according to David Carrasco, constitutes the "earliest account we have of an official Aztec history of the world."[323] In that document Quetzalcoatl is intimately associated with the events of Creation:

"Quetzalcoatl, one son of the Creative Pair, shares in the creation of the universe, the destruction of various ages, and the arrangement of the earth. He is one of two deities who lift the sky to reveal the earth."[324]

The same source describes Quetzalcoatl as having spent his youth running wild in the mountains, doing penance and preparing to become a great warrior. Other sources, such as the native chronicler Chimalpahin and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, describe Quetzalcoatl as a fierce warrior who oppressed the people at every turn.[325] The war god was especially renowned for his terrible furor:

[321] D. Carrasco, *op. cit*., p. 35.
[322] H. Nicholson, *op. cit*., p. 26.
[323] D. Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (Chicago, 1982), p. 35.
[324] *Ibid*., pp. 35-36.
[325] Quoted in M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 187.

"Wherever the Toltec knights went they took him with them. They portrayed him thrashing about the heavens over their array, his ardor and fury the model for theirs."[326]

Yet Quetzalcoatl is elsewhere described as a pious religious reformer—as the archetypal priest, in fact. Such apparent incongruities have led scholars to underscore the contradictory elements in the god's biography. Michel Graulich, for example, offered the following observation:

"Chronologically, he is dated from the beginning of the Christian Era to the twelfth century and beyond. He is called the initiator of human sacrifice as well as its opponent; and, to the bewilderment of historians, he appears either at the beginning or at the end of an empire that, according to some, lasts less than two centuries and, according to others, more than five hundred years. But Quetzalcoatl is also situated at both the beginning *and* the end of Toltec domination. Until the end of the last century there was scarcely any doubt about the historical authenticity of Quetzalcoatl and the Toltec."[327]

Nigel Davies also emphasized the god's mysterious, multifaceted nature:

"Because of its very timelessness, it is hard to reach the core of the Quetzalcoatl saga…one never quite knows who he really was or when he lived. Quetzalcoatl can be man, hero, or god, or as Plumed Serpent a mere symbol. Was there one or many human beings called Quetzalcoatl? When and where did he or they live?"[328]

Amazingly enough, Davies, like numerous other scholars,[329] concluded that Quetzalcoatl was human in nature:

"The legend of Quetzalcoatl…is so personal and individual that one is left with an impression that it may have been basically inspired by the deeds of a living person or several persons rather

[326] B. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Austin, 1979), p. 108.
[327] M. Graulich, *op. cit*., p. 167.
[328] N. Davies, *The Toltecs* (Norman, 1977), p. 56.
[329] S. Milbrath, *op. cit*., p. 17 writes: "Quetzalcoatl-Kukulcan is apparently a Toltec ruler who was apotheosized as Venus."

than have come into being by a kind of spontaneous combustion. Of course, there are obviously mythical additions, such as his transformation into the planet Venus."[330]

If it is agreed that the myth of Quetzalcoatl as it has come down to us is both fragmentary and riddled with secondary embellishments and corruptions, it would stand to reason that analysis of the Mesoamerican sources alone is likely to prove inconclusive and misleading in reconstructing an accurate "history" of the god-man. Indeed, it is our opinion that the career of Quetzalcoatl has nothing whatsoever to do with human affairs and is best understood through the corrective lens provided by the careers of other mythical Morning Stars. A comparative analysis of this sort readily reveals a structural pattern capable of clarifying the various mythical elements apparent in Quetzalcoatl's biography.

In the Codex Vienna especially—but also in other texts as well—Quetzalcoatl is represented as a classic example of a culture hero. Here one is reminded of the analogous traditions surrounding Motseyoef. As Motseyoef taught the Cheyenne how to drill fire so, too, was Quetzalcoatl credited with drilling the first fire (see figure two from the Codex in question).[331]

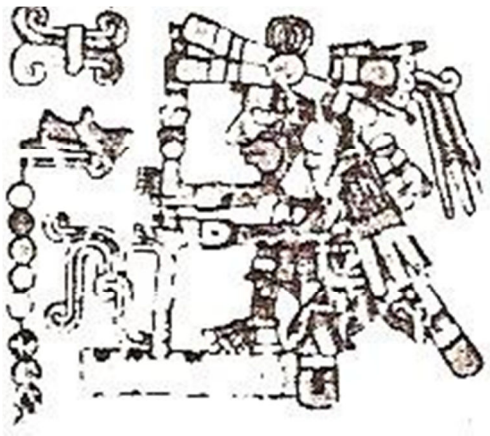

Figure two

[330] N. Davies, *op. cit*., p. 72.
[331] *Vindobonensis* 34-IV-33-I. See also the discussion of H. Nicholson, "The Deity 9 Wind 'Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl' in the Mixteca Pictorials," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 4 (1978), p. 72.

As the leader of the primeval migration that brought the ancestral Toltecs to Mexico, Quetzalcoatl mirrors Motseyoef, who is said to have led the Cheyenne on a similar journey. And, as was the case with Motseyoef, Quetzalcoatl is said to have immigrated from the North.[332]

According to the *Histoyre du Méchique*, the birth of Quetzalcoatl caused the death of his mother.[333] This incident also finds a parallel in the traditions surrounding the Cheyenne Morning Star, where a fall from heaven is said to have killed Motseyoef's mother during childbirth.

Quetzalcoatl's hideous appearance—attributed to his face being covered with sores and tumors—is best understood not by reference to some early ruler beset by skin ulcers but by comparison with analogous accounts describing the mythical Morning Star. The Sikuani myth of Creation is paradigmatic in this regard:

"In those days the sun and the moon and everyone were human beings and lived on this earth. Sun had a son who had sores all over his body; he was the morning star."[334]

The warrior-like ardor ascribed to Quetzalcoatl and emulated by his followers finds a striking parallel in the ardor ascribed to the Skidi Morning Star. As Skidi warriors set out to capture a human victim for their sacrificial rites, they chanted songs recounting the deeds of the Morning Star, one of which implored the warriors to assume a furor befitting the warrior-planet: "I became ferocious: I became like him."[335] Yet another song purports to quote the Morning Star himself as he set out to conquer Venus: "I become myself when I become angry."[336] Murie summarized the Pawnee beliefs regarding Mars' proverbial ferocity as follows:

"As they are about to attack the enemy, they seek to become filled with the spirit of the war god. When so filled, they become ferocious or angry. In this ritual the captive is present; but they

[332] H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder, 2001).
[333] B. Brundage, *op. cit*., p. 110.
[334] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), p. 26.
[335] J. Murie, "Ceremonies of the Pawnee: Part I: The Skiri," *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (1981), p. 127.
[336] R. Linton, "The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee," *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology* 6 (1923), p. 4.

sing this song because they are going to sacrifice her and must go through the ceremony in an angry, or warlike, mood. They must at least pretend to be angry. Morning Star is the war god and they are to act as if filled with his spirit."[337]

That the planet Mars was everywhere renowned for its ferocious demeanor and berserker-like bouts of "furor" and rage has been well documented.[338] In South America, for example, the Toba invoked the red planet to aid them in battle: "At times of battle he had to help and allocate weapons and sharpen them and put poison on them, and endow the Toba warriors with fighting spirit."[339]

A belligerent personality was ascribed to the red planet by Old World skywatchers as well. Thus, Babylonian astronomical texts warn that if a person is born during the appearance of Mars he will be "quick to anger."[340] The Indian astronomer Santhanam described the red planet as follows: "Mars has blood-red eyes, is fickle-minded…given to anger."[341] Similar ideas permeated medieval astrology, as is well known. Francis Bacon, for example, held that it was the nature of Mars to "excite men to anger, discord, and wars."[342] Of the seven deadly sins, one was named after the "anger" of Mars.[343]

The furor accorded the red planet finds a precise parallel in the furor associated with the Latin god Mars. According to Dumezil, such a disposition befitted a god of war:

"The ambiguous character of Mars, when he breaks loose on the field of battle, accounts for the epithet *caecus* given him by the poets. At a certain stage of *furor*, he abandons himself to his

[337] J. Murie, *op. cit*., p. 128.
[338] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 125-135. See also G. de Santillana & H. von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston, 1969), pp. 165-197.
[339] Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, "La Astronomia de los Tobas," *Revista del Museo de La Plata* 27 (1923), p. 272. Translation courtesy of Jan Sammer.
[340] F. Rochberg-Halton, "Benefic and Malefic Planets in Babylonian Astrology," in E. Leichty et al eds., *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 325.
[341] S. Markel, *Origins of the Indian Planetary Deities* (Lewiston, 1995), pp. 186, 192.
[342] *Opus majus*, 400.
[343] A. Aveni, *Conversing With the Planets* (New York, 1992), p. 145.

nature, destroying friend as well as foe…By virtue of these very qualities of *furor* and harshness, Mars is the surest bulwark of Rome against every aggressor."[344]

Such widespread beliefs will never be explained by reference to the familiar appearance of the planet Mars. Rather, they form an integral part of a complex pattern of characteristics universally accorded the warrior-hero—a pattern that has its origin in the unique and catastrophic history of the red planet.

Most significant and telling, however, is the fact that Quetzalcoatl—like Motseyoef—was transformed into the Morning Star upon dying. As was the case with the Cheyenne culture-hero, it was believed that Quetzalcoatl would one day return to reclaim his throne. In light of such striking correspondences—more of which will be enumerated in the chapters to follow—it would seem to follow that Quetzalcoatl's biography is modeled on the "history" of the mythical Morning Star as witnessed in the skies overhead.

[344] G. Dumezil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, *Vol. 1* (Chicago, 1970), p. 229.

The First Star

Granted that Quetzalcoatl is to be identified as the mythical "Morning Star," how are we confirm that the star in question was the planet Mars rather than Venus, as per the conventional view? This is the all-important question, needless to say. In addition to the compelling circumstantial evidence provided by comparative mythology there is one decisive bit of testimony: In the Codex Telleriano Remensis, a colonial text providing commentary on prehispanic paintings and sacred lore that dates from around 1560, it is stated that Quetzalcoatl—as the Morning Star—was regarded as the first "light" to appear at Creation.[345] The Codex also includes the following gloss offered by an anonymous scribe: "Properly speaking, the first light that appeared in the world."[346]

[*The Codex Vaticano Latino contains a very similar report regarding Quetzalcoatl's alter ego—Tlahuizcalpantecutli. There it is written:

"This was the Dawn god or the god of Light when day wants to come in…at daybreak. They say that it was created before the sun."[347]]

This apparent vestige from Aztec sacred lore offers a striking parallel to the Skidi report that the planet Mars, as the Morning Star, was the first star to appear in heaven. Recall again Murie's account of Creation: "The first one he placed in the heavens was the morning star."[348]

Now here is an interesting report. Why would Mars, rather than some other planet or star, be deemed the "first" to appear in heaven at Creation? The answer to this question will go a long

[345] E. Keber, *Codex Telleriano Remensis* (Austin, 1995), p. 175.
[346] *Ibid*., p. 262.
[347] 3738, quoted from E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 53.
[348] J. Murie, *op. cit*., p. 38.

way towards explaining the historical context—and celestial roots—of ancient cosmogonies everywhere.[349]

Other New World cultures preserved analogous traditions about the Morning Star. The Morning Star's epiphany at Creation is described as follows in the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred text of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala compiled during the sixteenth century:

"And here is the dawning and showing of the sun, moon, and stars. And Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Machucutah, and True Jaguar were overjoyed when they saw the daybringer. It came up first. It looked brilliant when it came up, since it was ahead of the sun."[350]

The same idea is attested amongst the Inca of South America. There, too, the "Morning Star" was accorded a fundamental primacy in cosmogonic lore. Thus, Gary Urton recorded the following tradition: "*Papa pachapacariq ch'aska* ('father morning star'), which is said to have been the first bright object to appear in the dark primeval sky at the beginning of time."[351]

Granted that the Morning Star was deemed the "first light" to appear at Creation, how are we to verify the Skidi memory that it was the planet Mars and not Venus, as the Codex Telleriano Remensis might lead us to believe? A wealth of evidence can be brought to bear on this question. Perhaps the most compelling testimony comes from the rain forests of South America, where the Makiritare Indians have remained virtually immune from outside influences while pursuing a stone-age lifestyle along the Orinoco River. The anthropologist Marc de Civrieux, working in the 1950's, managed to collect and transcribe for the first time a collection of their sacred oral traditions—the Watunna. According to de Civrieux, "the myths of the Makiritare are the story of what the 'Old People', the Heavenly Ancestors, did."[352] In the Makiritare account of Creation, it was the planet Mars that was the first star to appear in heaven:

[349] We intend to explore this theme in great detail in a future volume in this series.
[350] D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 1985), p. 181.
[351] G. Urton, *At the Crossroads of the Earth and Sky* (Austin, 1981), p. 107.
[352] M. de Civrieux, *Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle* (San Francisco, 1980), p. 12.

"In the beginning, the night sky was empty, black. The stars were people. They lived on the Earth…They were the first ones to arrive [in heaven]. Right away they changed. They started shining. They were the first two stars in the black night. The very first was Ahishama, then Kutto. Now that Troupial named Ahishama burns orange (Mars). He built the ladder in space. That's what they say."[353]

The significance of this sacred tradition from the Watunna is immeasurable, for it serves to corroborate the Skidi claim that the planet Mars was the first star to appear at Creation. The fundamentally identical reports of the Aztecs, Maya, and Inca with respect to the cosmogonic primacy of the Morning Star, in turn, are best understood as originally referring to the planet Mars, not Venus. It will be noticed, moreover, that the Makiritare—like the Skidi, Inca, Aztecs, and Maya—ascribed a masculine nature to the prototypical "first star." Properly interpreted, this datum also supports a Martian identity of the mythical Morning Star, the planet Mars being the masculine planetary power *par excellence*.

[353] *Ibid*., pp. 113-114.

The Red Star

Comparative philology provides additional evidence pointing to the same conclusion. Thus it can hardly be a coincidence that various tribes throughout aboriginal North America denoted the Morning Star by a name that translates as "Great/Red Star." The Delaware Indians, for example, described the Morning Star as "the Great Star or Red Star."[354] The Delaware, like the Seneca and Cheyenne, speak an Algonquian dialect. A similar situation is evident amongst the Siouan-speaking Osage; they knew the Morning Star by a name that signified "Great Star or Red Star."[355] For the Osage, as for the Delaware, the Morning Star is a male being.

An analogous semantic pattern is discernible in various Mesoamerican languages. A Yucatec Maya name for the Morning Star is Chak Ek, the latter signifying "Great/Red Star." In the post-colonial *Book of Chilam Balam* there occurs a prophecy announcing the end of the age and the return of Chak Ek:

"This is a new day which dawns for us; this is what you tell of today. This shall be the end of the katun of carnal sin. Soon shall it end. The law of the ruler comes. Then there shall come the Seven Mountains, the Red Star, and in the wind-swollen sky <there shall be> the House of Storms." [356]

Insofar as eschatological traditions are thought to reflect cosmogonical ideas projected into the future, the prophecy from the *Book of Chilam Balam* likely has reference to the primeval appearance of the mythical Morning Star as the "first star" at the Dawn of Time. That such ideas were current during the post-Colonial period is evidence by the following tradition from the *Titulo C'oyoi*, a Quiché document stemming from around 1560. It, too, appears to preserve a

[354] D. Miller, *Stars of the First People* (Boulder, 1997), p. 56.
[355] *Ibid*., p. 234.
[356] Ralph Roys, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Norman, 1967), p. 159.

reminiscence of the mythical Morning Star's initial appearance as the "first star" in heaven at Creation:

"Then there at Amak'tan, the name of the mountain, the red place, (was) Amak'tan… when it dawned, they were kneeling, they were occupied…shouting, when the great star came out."[357]

Scholars typically understand Chak Ek as the planet Venus, needless to say.[358] Yet there is reason to question this identification. Even while accepting the conventional identification, Brian Stross called attention to the apparent anomaly whereby the Maya would describe Venus by a name signifying "red":

"The planet Venus is associated with the color red among the Maya of Mexico, for its name is given, even in Maya dictionaries from early Colonial times, as 'red/great star'. The same association holds for the Maya of Classical Times (300-900 AD) and of the Post-Classic period (900-1400 AD). We know this because the Classic and Post-Classic Maya had a glyphic writing system, and in it the glyph collocation representing Venus includes the glyph for the color red. More specifically, the Lamat-Venus glyph (T510) is the glyph of the planet Venus, an identification accepted by virtually every epigrapher concerned with Maya glyphs. The basic form of the glyph—a circled cross with a circlet in each quadrant—is so widespread that it has the meaning 'Morning Star' (which we usually interpret as Venus) among the Tarahumara of Northern Mexico. The name that some Mayans have for Venus appears to have been borrowed by Tarascans (as far away as Michoacan, Mexico). More relevant to the Maya area:

'The red prefix is usually found with the Venus glyph (fig. 42, 31, 33), but rarely on the monuments (fig. 54, 5). One is reminded that one of the names for Venus was chac ek, 'red star' or 'giant star'.'

The glyphic prefix for red given with the Venus glyph; a Yucatec Maya name for Venus with a focal meaning of 'red'. This is persuasive evidence that the color red is connected with Venus.

[357] R. Carmack, *Quichean Civilization* (Berkeley, 1973), p. 288.
[358] S. Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya* (Austin, 1999), p. 201.

To be sure, the Yucatec term *chak* means both 'red' and 'great, giant' as well as 'intense'; and it is also the case that such Maya names for Venus as Tzotzil *muk'ta k'anal*, literally 'large star', and Chuj *niwan k'anal*, literally 'large star' have no apparent connection with red. However, the colonial Tzeltal term *tzajal ek'*, 'red star', refers to 'red' and not to 'large', and presumably names Venus. Furthermore, 'red' and 'great' appear to have some color symbolic affinity, for the terms are not only homophonous in Yucatec; they are homophonous in a number of other languages as well; e.g., Chinese *hong* (rising tone)—'red, great, grand, magnificent' and Russian *krasni* (or *krasnoy*)—'red, magnificent'.

Connecting Venus with the color red is surprising, of course. Venus, if it could be said to have a color, would have to be described as silvery. Only Mars, of the planets, could be described as 'red' or 'reddish'. Oddly, Venus was given by the Maya a Martian color attribute; and further, the death and calamity distributed by Venus, with its apparently warlike nature, again suggests the planet Mars from the perspective of Old World symbolism."[359]

Although Venus occasionally presents a red appearance, it does not usually do so. Rather, it is the planet Mars that is everywhere known as the "red" or "fire-colored" star. Mars' redness did not escape the Maya, needless to say. Thus it is that the Tzotzil of Zinacantan described the planet Mars by the name of *tsahal k'anal*, "red star."[360]

In lieu of the evidence presented in this and previous chapters, a reevaluation of the terminology describing the Morning Star is in order. The fact that the Skidi and Cheyenne both describe the mythical Morning Star as "red" in color suggests that the Skidi were right in identifying this star as Mars. The same conclusion follows from the fact that the Skidi described the Morning Star/Mars as the "first light" to appear at Creation, a tradition corroborated by the Makiritare in South America, for whom the "first light" is expressly identified as Mars. Such traditions constitute compelling circumstantial evidence in support of the hypothesis that, in describing the Morning Star with names signifying "Great/Red Star," the ancient skywatchers were describing the planet Mars—the mythical Morning Star—and not Venus.

[359] B. Stross, "Venus and Sirius: Some Unexpected Similarities," *Kronos* XII:1 (1987), pp. 26-27.
[360] S. Milbrath, *op. cit*., p. 37.

Nanahuatl

In the Post-Colonial accounts of Quetzalcoatl's transformation into the Morning Star, the link between the god's cremation and the spectacular events of Creation has been obscured. Yet it is possible to deduce that cosmogony formed the original context of this myth nonetheless.

A central episode in the Aztec Creation myth finds a wretched god named Nanahuatl cremating himself in order to bring "light" and order to the cosmos. Of Nanahuatl's physical appearance it is said that "his whole body was covered by running sores"[361] The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún related the following version of the god's auto-sacrifice:

"They used to say that before there was day in the world the gods met together…and said one to another: 'Who shall have the task of lighting the world?' Then to these words a god called Tecuzistecatl answered and said: 'I shall take charge of lighting the world.' Then again the gods spoke and said: "Who else?' At that moment they looked at one another and conferred who should be the other, and none of them dared offer themselves for the task; they were all afraid and excused themselves. One of the gods to whom they were paying no attention, and who was afflicted with scabs, did not speak but listened to what the other gods said. The others spoke to him and said: 'Be thou he that shall light the world, scabby one,' and he with a good will obeyed what they ordered…Afterwards they lighted a fire in the hearth that was built in a rock…And then he [Tecuzistecatl] prepared to throw himself in, but turned away…And when the gods had spoken to him he [Nanahuatl] made an effort and closed his eyes, and rushed forward, and cast himself into the fire like one roasting."[362]

As the star responsible for bringing light to a primeval world otherwise distinguished by an overwhelming darkness and gloom—"before there was day in the world"—we recognize the

[361] B. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Austin, 1979), p. 41.
[362] *Florentine Codex. General History of the Things of New Spain, Vol. 2* (Santa Fe, 1950-1970), pp. 12-14 as translated in L. Séjourne, *Burning Water* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 74-75.

mythical Morning Star in its role as the "first light" at Creation. Nanahuatl's scabrous appearance also supports his identification as the mythical Morning Star.

A number of different sources describe Nanahuatl's martyrdom. Burr Brundage summarized the various versions as follows:

"The fourth sun had died, and the cosmos weltered about in a sullen gloom. The gods then decided that they must create another sun, which they would initiate through a sacrificial act—in other words, one of their number would have to die so that a new sun could come into being. A great fire was accordingly kindled on an eminence in Teotihuacan, this being the only beacon in the darkness…In contrasting versions the myth allows us to see that Nanahuatl either volunteered himself or was chosen. All the sources, however, agree that he was repulsive to look at and indeed was the last being whom one might think worthy of becoming the sun…Generally, however, the wretched god volunteers. He does so either as a genuinely humble and selfless person or because, being a great sorcerer, he can perform the act with impunity. The latter version is revealing. A situation is presented to us in which all the gods are eager for the honor of becoming the sun and all contend for the distinction. But Nanahuatl through his magic powers either descends into the underworld or enters a world of flames whence he returns laden with jewels."[363]

[*It is notable that the pustulous Aztec god is said to have emerged from the bonfire adorned with jewels. This tradition is curiously reminiscent of the fate of Venus's scabrous paramour in Papuan lore. Recall the passage quoted earlier:

"When the flames blazed up he flung himself among the glowing embers, and immediately his shriveled skin peeled off, and all the scabs were turned into copper trinkets, beautiful corals, and gold and silver bracelets. He himself came forth from the fire a handsome young man."[364]]

[363] B. Brundage, *The Phoenix of the Western World* (Norman, 1982), pp. 225-226.
[364] J. Frazer, *Apollodorus: The Library, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 361.

The resemblance of Nanahuatl's auto-da-fé to the cremation suffered by Quetzalcoatl is readily apparent and has led some scholars to identify the two gods. As Graulich pointed out, it is awfully difficult to distinguish between the "historical" god-man Quetzalcoatl and the scabrous Star of cosmogonical myth: "The youthful, penitent, self-sacrificing, conquering, strong yet poor Quetzalcoatl corresponds exactly to Nanahuatl—he is the 'Pimply One.'"[365] Of Quetzalcoatl's cremation, likewise, Graulich observes: "It is a repetition of Nanahuatl's sacrifice."[366]

Other traditions surrounding Nanahuatl support his identification with Quetzalcoatl. According to Nahua traditional lore, Nanahuatl was responsible for the introduction of maize, the latter discovered as a result of his throwing a thunderbolt at a mountain, thereby releasing the maize from its rocky prison.[367] Yet the very same discovery is elsewhere attributed to Quetzalcoatl.[368]

The Codex Borgia preserves a curious illustration of direct interest to the thesis developed here: There the sore-laden Nanahuatl is depicted as being cooked in a great pot (see figure three).[369] This tradition suggests that the Aztec god's cremation is structurally analogous to the fiery baptisms associated with the Latin Mars and Greek Demophon.

Figure three

[365] M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 190.
[366] *Ibid*., p. 203.
[367] D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 1985), p. 251.
[368] *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 121. See also the account in E. Thompson, *Ethnology of the Mayas of Southern and Central British Honduras* (Chicago, 1930), p. 140.
[369] B. Brundage*, op. cit*., p. 226.

Equally interesting is another scene from the same source: There Nanahuatl is depicted as impregnating the Earth goddess. It is this primeval *hieros gamos* involving Nanahuatl that is said to produce maize and fertility.[370]

[370] *Ibid*., p. 95.

The Egyptian Morning Star

"The Egyptians' relationship to nature was characterized by an unusual wealth of detail and by a precision of observation and description, yet also by a peculiar narrowness of interest."[371]

The great gods confront us already at the dawn of history. The Egyptian Horus is a case in point, his preeminence in ancient Egyptian religion being everywhere apparent. The pharaoh himself was considered to be the earthly incarnation of the god, an idea reflected in the so-called Horus names borne by early rulers.

Yet if it is acknowledged that Horus represents the quintessential Egyptian god, there is no consensus as to his origins or fundamental nature. That he was a celestial power all authorities concur. The question, however, is what celestial power best explains Horus's characteristic role in Egyptian religion?

A survey of the relevant scholarship on the matter reveals that Horus has typically been identified with the sun.[372] That said, other scholars have advanced arguments that the god is to be identified with the planet Venus;[373] with the star Sirius;[374] and with the amorphous sky.[375] In the present chapter we will attempt to offer a definitive answer to the god's celestial identity.

The cult of Horus is prominent already in predynastic times (Writing itself is first attested in Egypt during the Predynastic Period, ca. 3200 BCE, in the Abydos tomb known as U-j[376]). Rulers at Nekhen, for example, worshipped the falcon-god prior to the unification of Egypt.

[371] J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2001), p. 54.
[372] T. Allen, *Horus in the Pyramid Texts* (Chicago, 1916), p. 11, writes: "The solar element in Horus clearly predominates." A similar opinion was expressed by Sethe, Budge, and Breasted.
[373] R. Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 216-234.
[374] R. Anthes, "Horus als Sirius in den Pyramidentexten," *Zeitschrift für Agyptischen Sprache* 102 (1975), pp. 1-10.
[375] W. Schenkel, "Horus," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* III (Berlin, 1977), col. 14, writes: "The oldest function of Horus may have been that of a Heaven-god."
[376] T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 2001), p. 19.

In the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 3000-2600 BCE), Horus is explicitly identified as a star. This much is evident from the fact that royal domains were named after the astral god. The domain established by Anedjib was called *Ór-sbå-©t*, "Horus, star of the corporation (of gods)."[377] Hetepsekhemwy established a domain called *Ór-Δœ-sbå*, "Horus risen as a star."[378] Khasekhemwy founded a new domain called *Ór-sbå-båw*, "Horus, the star of souls."[379] Most informative, perhaps, is the domain established at the beginning of the Third Dynasty by Djoser, named *Ór-sbå-Δnti-pt*, "Horus, star at the front of the sky" (Toby Wilkinson translates this name as "foremost star of the sky.")[380]

To judge by the evidence of these names, Horus was originally conceived as a stellar power—indeed, as a prominent star "at the front of the sky." That said, the extant texts are of little help in pinpointing exactly which particular celestial body represented Horus during this period.

In addition to the god's astral connection, there is clear evidence that Horus was conceptualized as a powerful warrior very early on. This is certainly the case in the Pyramid Texts. Witness the following spell from Queen Neith's pyramid, wherein the deceased king is expressly compared to Horus:

"So, ascend to the sky amongst the stars in the sky, and those before you shall hide and those after you shall be afraid of you, because of this your identity of Horus of the Duat…of the one who strikes them, of the one who spews them out, and wipes them out, and you will strike them, spew them out, and wipe them out at the lake, at the Great Green. You shall come to stand at the fore of the Imperishable Stars and sit on your metal throne from which the dead are far away."[381]

The names of Egyptian kings also bear witness to this idea. Witness the following observation of Toby Wilkinson:

[377] *Ibid*., p. 121.
[378] *Ibid*., p. 121.
[379] *Ibid*., p. 121.
[380] *Ibid*., p. 122.
[381] J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 323.

"The Horus names of several First Dynasty kings express the aggressive authority of Horus, perhaps reflecting the coercive power of kingship at this early stage of Egyptian statehood. Names like 'Horus the fighter' (Aha), 'Horus the strong' (Djer) or 'arm-raising Horus' (Qaa) call to mind the warlike iconography of the earliest royal monuments from the period of state formation."[382]

This evidence, taken in conjunction with the Early Dynastic domain names, raises the strong presumption that the stellar Horus was imagined as a formidable warrior. And this portrait of the god constitutes a decisive clue as to his stellar identity.

Additional information regarding the star-god Horus is to be found in the Pyramid Texts dating from roughly a half millennium later (ca. 2300 BCE). That Horus was not the sun, as often maintained, is suggested by various hymns wherein the god is clearly distinguished from the ancient sun god Ra. In the following passage, for example, Horus (as the deceased king) is implored to ascend to heaven and join Re:

"Rêœ summons you into the zenith (?) of the sky as the Jackal, the Governor of the Two Enneads, and as Horus *Ônty-mnit.f*; may he set you as the Morning Star in the midst of the Field of Rushes."[383]

Here, as elsewhere in the Pyramid Texts, Horus is identified with the "Morning Star." In this form Horus is addressed as the "son" of the sun god and thus he would appear to represent a distinct celestial body altogether—presumably a particularly prominent planet or star.

In order to understand the origins of Horus's cult it will be necessary to identify the celestial body signified by the epithet "Morning Star." Unfortunately, this is not a simple matter to determine from the Egyptian texts alone. The earliest texts, such as the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, never describe the star-god in such a manner or context that his identification with a

[382] T. Wilkinson, *op. cit*., p. 202.
[383] PT 1719d.

familiar asterism is either obvious or conclusive. Instead we read that the Morning Star—as Horus—ascended to heaven in order to join Re in the celestial Hereafter.

Raymond Faulkner, together with other authorities, considered it a foregone conclusion that Venus must be the stellar body referenced by the phrase "Morning Star." Thus, in a comprehensive survey of Egyptian star-lore Faulkner wrote as follows: "As regards the identification of the Morning Star and the Lone Star with actual celestial bodies, there can be little doubt that, as elsewhere, the Morning Star is Phosphorus, Venus as seen at dawn."[384]

The most detailed study of Egyptian star religion to date is that by Rolf Krauss. He, too, would identify Horus with the planet Venus, citing as evidence various passages in the Pyramid Texts that describe the star as shining in the "eastern" portion of the morning sky while moving with respect to other stars, a characteristic of planets rather than stars.[385] Krauss summarized his findings as follows:

"As early as the beginning of dynastic times Horus seems to be identified with the planet Venus. The names of the so-called royal vineyards describe Horus as a star. The name of Djoser's vineyard reveals that Horus is a particular star 'at the front of the sky'. The identification of Horus with Venus as known from the Pyramid Texts suggests itself…Royal ideology and ideas about the Hereafter seem to have had cosmological and stellar foundations which may well go back to predynastic times."[386]

But the identification of Horus with the planet Venus *is not known* from the Pyramid Texts—quite to the contrary, as we intend to show. Here Krauss has simply assumed what has yet to be proven—that early references to Horus as the "Morning Star" have reference to Venus—and argued in a wholly circular fashion. That said, we would endorse Krauss's conclusion that Egyptian ideas about the Hereafter reflect astronomical conceptions.

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[384] R. Faulkner, "The King and the Star-Religion in the Pyramid Texts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 25 (1966), p. 161.
[385] R. Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 216-234.
[386] R. Krauss, "The Eye of Horus and the Planet Venus: Astronomical and Mythological References," in J. Steele & A. Imhausen eds., *Under One Sky* (Münster, 2002), p. 205.

Lord of the Netherworld

An analysis of Horus's early epithets offers additional insight into his astral origins. A recurring epithet of the god is *Duat*, written with the following determinative——and traditionally translated as "Netherworld." The word *Duat*, in turn, is derived from the root *dwꜣ*, "morning," whence comes Horus's epithet *Neter Dua* "Morning Star (or God)."[387] The etymology of *Duat* suggests that Horus's identity as the Morning Star is indissolubly connected to his role as Lord of the "Netherworld." In a passage from the Pyramid Texts the association between the "Morning Star" and the *Duat* is made explicit: "O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *wꜣdꜣd*-bird whom the sky bore…"[388]

Although often sought for underground, the earliest texts suggest that the *Duat* was celestial in nature.[389] The following passage is especially telling in this regard:

"Make the sky clear and shine on them as a god; may you be enduring at the head of the sky as Horus of the Netherworld."[390]

Horus is here described as standing at the "head" or front of the sky as Lord of the *Duat*. This would appear to confirm the *Duat's* location in plain and prominent view.

Equally indicative of the *Duat's* celestial location are those statements to the effect that it is to be found in the immediate vicinity of the ancient sun-god. Consider the following passage from the Pyramid Texts, wherein the deceased king ascends to the *Duat* in order to be near Re:

[387] J. Allen, "The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts," in J. Allen et al eds., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 23.
[388] PT 1207.
[389] E. Hornung, "Dat," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie, Vol. 1* (Berlin, 1974), col. 994. See also L. Lesko, "Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology," in B. Shafer ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 119-120.
[390] PT 1948.

"Lift up your faces, you gods who are in the Netherworld [*Duat*], for the King has come that you may see him, he having become the great god. The king is ushered in with trembling, the King is robed. Guard yourselves, all of you, for the King governs men, the King judges the living within the domain of Rêœ…The King sits with those who row the bark of Rêœ, the King commands what is good and he does it, for the King is the great god."[391]

Samuel Mercer, in his commentary on this passage, acknowledged the *Duat's* fundamental identity with the domain of Re: "The *Dwå.t* here is heaven, identical with the 'land of Rêœ' (273b), which is heaven, where the king becomes a great god, 272b."[392]

The intimate association between Horus *Duat* and the region of the sky occupied by the ancient sun god is also apparent in the following passage, wherein Horus is said to "illumine" the sky from his station in the *Duat* near Re:

"Reœ has [taken (?)] me to himself, to the sky, to the eastern side of the sky; As this Horus, as the dweller in the Netherworld, As this star which illumines the sky."[393]

In apparent contradiction to its intimate association with the ancient sun-god, the Pyramid Texts elsewhere describe the *Duat* as located in the circumpolar region. Thus, in the following passage the deceased king is identified with Horus *Duat* and set amongst the Imperishable Stars:

"May you go up as Horus of the Netherworld who is at the head of the Imperishable Stars."[394]

Horus is here described with the epithet *Δntj jΔmw-Ωkjw*, translated alternately as "head" or "front" of the Imperishable Stars.[395] As Krauss points out, the epithet in question describes Horus *Duat* with specific relation to the Imperishable Stars, the latter conventionally understood

[391] PT 272-274.
[392] S. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts, Vol. 2* (New York, 1952), p. 126. K. Sethe offered a similar analysis in *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den altägyptischen Pyramidentexten*, *Vol. 1* (Leipzig, 1962), pp. 283-284.
[393] PT 362.
[394] PT 1301.
[395] R. Krauss, *op. cit*., p. 229 renders this passage as follows: "Mögest du herausgehen als Datischer Horus, 'befindlich an der Spitze' der 'Unvergänglichen Sterne'."

as the circumpolar stars; i.e., it presents him as standing at their "front" or vertex and thus, presumably, in the circumpolar region itself. If so, this passage poses a seemingly insurmountable problem for Krauss's hypothesis that Horus is to be identified with the planet Venus, as that planet can hardly be said to stand at the "front" of the circumpolar stars. In the current solar system, Venus never moves more than 45 degrees from the ecliptic and is thus far removed from the circumpolar region at all times.

Horus's Ascent to Heaven

A key to understanding the celestial identity of Horus is his propensity for "ascending" to heaven. Thus, a recurring idea in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts implores the deceased king to emulate Horus in ascending to heaven so that he might join the stellar entourage of the ancient sun god. This idea is evident in the following passage, wherein the king is identified with Horus as the Morning Star: "O King, may you ascend as the Morning Star, may you be rowed as the Lake-dweller."[396]

The same idea is apparent in the following passages from the Pyramid Texts:

"You ascend to the sky as a star, as the Morning Star."[397]

"Rêœ has summoned you from the zenith (?) of the sky as Horus…He sets you as the Morning Star in the middle of the Field of Rushes, you being seated on your throne."[398]

Equally prevalent throughout the Pyramid and Coffin Texts are prayers bidding the king to mount a ladder, stair, or some other structure in order to reach the kingdom of the Sun-god.[399] Witness the following passage: "A ladder to the sky shall be put together for you and Nut will extend her hands towards you…."[400]

An ascent to heaven along a ladder or staircase is all attested in the following passages:

[396] PT 871.
[397] PT 1366. See also PT 2014.
[398] PT 805.
[399] See the discussion in W. Davis, "The Ascension-Myth in the Pyramid Texts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36:3 (1977), pp. 161-179. See also H. Blok, "Zur altägyptischen Vorstellung der Himmelsleiter," *Acta Orientalia* 6 (1928), pp. 257-269.
[400] R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Vol. 1* (Warminster, 1973), p. 58.

"A ladder is set up for him that he may ascend on it."[401]

"A stairway to the sky is set up for me that I may ascend on it to the sky, as I ascend on the smoke of the great censing."[402]

"Stairs to the sky are laid for him that he may ascend thereon to the sky."[403]

"A stairway to the sky is set up for you among the Circumpolar Stars."[404]

The celestial backdrop of such imagery is readily apparent. Thus, it is as a "star" that the king is bidden to mount the ladder in order to join Re: "The King is a star in the sky among the gods…bring to the king [the ladder] which Khnum has made that the King may ascend on it to the sky and escort Rêœ in the sky."[405]

That the "star" in question was Horus is deducible from the Pyramid Texts. Witness the following text, wherein Horus announces his intention to escort Re in heaven: "Let the ladder of the god be given to me, let the ladder of Set be given to me, that I may ascend on it to the sky and escort Rêœ…"[406] Yet another passage identifies the deceased king with Horus: "When this Pepi goes up, Horus of the *Duat* will go up to the sky on the ladder."[407]

That Horus is intimately connected with the celestial ladder is confirmed by the god's epithet *nb måk.t*, "lord of the ladder."[408]

In seeking to establish the original stellar identity of Horus it is necessary to ask the following question: Which star was renowned for ascending to heaven on a ladder?

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[401] PT 1431.
[402] PT 365.
[403] PT 1108. See also J. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 110.
[404] PT 773-774. See R. Faulkner, "The King and the Star-Religion in the Pyramid Texts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 25 (1966), p. 156.
[405] PT 1586.
[406] PT 973-975.
[407] PT 352 as translated by J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 137.
[408] PT 974, 980. See also T. Allen, *Horus in the Pyramid Texts* (Chicago, 1916), p. 17.

The answer is provided by the aforementioned Makiritare tradition recorded in the Watunna, wherein the planet Mars was described as the "first star" to appear at Creation after ascending a ladder spanning heaven. Relevant excerpts from that oral tradition follow:

"We're going to heaven. Okay. Who'll go? Who'll be first? Who's going with the arrows?" There was another man named Ahishama. He was very wise. "Can you?" Wlaha asked? "I'll go," Ahishama answered…He turned him into a bird. He was beautiful, brilliant, with orange-colored feathers, and very fast and light. His name was Ahishama, the troupial [a species of bird]. There was another man. "Can you?" "I'll go." He turned him into a frog…They called him Kutto…Wlaha shot. The arrow sped out. It flew up. Troupial flew up. Frog leapt. Wlaha screamed: "Fly! Jump! Catch it! Tie it! Ahishama was carrying the end of a vine in his beak. We call that vine he had *sahudiwa*, vine-chain. It's a long, long vine, all wrinkled and creased…The seven Wlaha shot another arrow and then another and another. Seven arrows in all. They hung there in space, seven rungs tied to that big vine**.** It was the ladder, the road to Heaven. That Troupial and Frog built. Ahishama and Kutto. They climbed up without a ladder. When they built it there was no road.

They were the first ones to arrive. Right away they changed. They started shining. They were the first two stars in the black night. The very first was Ahishama, then Kutto. Now that Troupial named Ahishama burns orange (Mars). He built the ladder in space. That's what they say."[409]

Far from being unique in having the planet Mars ascend a ladder-to-heaven, the Makiritare account finds an intriguing parallel in the mythological traditions surrounding the Mars-god Nergal. Thus, in an epic known as *Nergal and Ereshkigal* Nergal is described as ascending a stairway to heaven, ostensibly to reach the assembly of the gods:

[409] *Ibid*., pp. 113-114.

"Nergal came up the long stairway of heaven. When he arrived at the gate of Anu, Ellil, and Ea, Anu, Ellil, and Ea saw him and said, 'The son of Ishtar has come back to us.'"[410]

[410] Translation from S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1991), p. 171. See also O. Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets," *Anatolian Studies* 10 (1960), pp. 125, 130.

Horus and Nergal

The stellar identity of Horus can be resolved once and for all by comparing the Egyptian traditions with those from other ancient astronomies. Here the evidence from ancient Mesopotamia is especially instructive. In the very earliest Egyptian sources, as we have seen, Horus was represented as a prominent star and warrior. In Babylonian astronomical texts it is the planet Mars—as Nergal—that was regarded as the warrior-star par excellence.[411]

A comparative analysis of the cults of Horus and Nergal will readily confirm their fundamentally analogous nature. Horus, as we have seen, was known as the "Lord of the Netherworld" (*Duat*). Here one finds a precise parallel in the cult of Nergal, the latter being invoked as *umun-úrugal*, "Lord of the Netherworld."[412]

Nergal is elsewhere described by the epithet *Lugal-IGI.DU-anna*, "king at the front of heaven."[413] It will be obvious at once that this epithet forms an exact semantic counterpart to Horus's epithet *sbå-Δnti-pt*, "star at the front of the sky," cited earlier. The fact that the latter epithet is attested already in the Third Dynasty confirms its archaic and likely archetypal nature.

In the Coffin Texts, Horus is described as "raging" against the gods.[414] Here, as elsewhere, the word used to describe the god's terrible furor is *dndn*.[415] Nergal, too, was described as raging against the gods. Witness the following passage:

"O warrior, splendid one…Mighty of arms, broad of chest, perfect one without rival among all the gods, Who grasps the pitiless deluge-weapon, who massacres the enemy, Lion clad in

[411] D. Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* (Groningen, 2000), p. 56. See also the extensive discussion in E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 15-26.
[412] D. Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 404.
[413] W. Lambert, "Lugal-IGI.DU-anna," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol.* 7 (Berlin, 1983), p. 142.
[414] CT 1:51.
[415] R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Oxford, 1973), p. 10.

splendor, at the flaring-up of whose fierce brilliance, The gods of the inhabited world took to secret places…"[416]

Of the various words used to describe Nergal's furor *dandannu* is particularly common.[417] The latter word is an apparent cognate of the Egyptian verb used to describe Horus's raging.

In the Pyramid and Coffin Texts Horus is intimately associated with the *akhet*, an Egyptian term for the place of sunrise and conventionally translated as "horizon." Horus's epithet *Harachte*—"Horus of the *akhet*"—confirms the connection. As its hieroglyph reveals— —the *akhet* came to signify the celestial mountain over which the ancient sun god appeared.[418] A wealth of evidence indicates that it was the planet Mars, not Venus, which formed the subject of these particular traditions surrounding Horus. Thus, it is relevant to note that Egyptian astronomical texts identified Mars as *Harachte*—"Horus of the *akhet*."[419]

The planet-god Nergal is likewise associated with the mountain of sunrise. Thus it is said that he "rises in the mountain where the sun rises."[420] According to the Sumerian hymn *Enlil and Ninlil*, Nergal was assigned the mountain of sunrise (*Ôursag*) at his birth.[421]

As a warrior-star, the star "at the front of the sky," Lord of the Netherworld, raging one, and Lord of the Ladder—not to mention his intimate association with the mountain of sunrise—Horus shares a specific set of characteristics with Nergal. These shared epithets and attributes strongly suggest that both gods have reference to a common celestial prototype. It is our contention that there is a perfectly logical explanation for the thematic parallelisms between the cults of Horus and Nergal: Both gods originated as personifications of the planet Mars.

[416] B. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 622.
[417] E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), p. 72.
[418] J. Assmann, "Horizont," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie, Vol. 3* (Berlin, 1977), cols. 3-7.
[419] O. Neugebauer & R. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts, Vol. 3* (London, 1960), p. 179.
[420] A. Sjöberg & E. Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (Locust Valley, 1969), pp. 106.
[421] *Ibid*., pp. 51, 88. See also J. Black et al., "A tigi to Nergal (Nergal C)," *ETCSL*.

Horus and Hathor

The greatest goddess of ancient Egypt was Hathor, described as the mother of Horus and as the "Lady of the Stars."[422] As I have documented elsewhere, the Egyptian goddess represents a close structural analogue to the Sumerian Inanna.[423] Greek emigrants to Egypt identified Hathor with Aphrodite.[424] If we are to judge from the evidence provided by comparative mythology, Hathor is to be identified with the planet Venus.

A prominent ceremony during the Egyptian New Year rites featured a sacred marriage between Horus and Hathor. Barbara Lesko describes the ceremony at Edfu as follows:

"On arriving at Edfu, on the day of the New Moon, her entourage was met by Horus and his following. The couple removed to an adjacent temple where they were presented with Ma'at, the sacred image of universal perfection, and offered the first fruits of the field. The gods then reboarded their boats and, accompanied by officials and townsfolk, sailed on to the temple of Horus at Edfu, where a sacred marriage took place between Hathor and Horus…The 'wedding' was celebrated with two weeks of drinking and feasting."[425]

As the Egyptian Morning Star and the masculine agent in a sacred *hieros gamos*, Horus forms a remarkable parallel to the Skidi Morning Star, the latter explicitly identified with the planet Mars.

[422] Line 271 in the tale of Sinuhe, for example.
[423] E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 159-165.
[424] H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), p. 277.
[425] Barbara Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman, 1999), p. 127.

Horus Myths

In the earliest Egyptian texts—the Pyramid and Coffin Texts—there are no complete mythological narratives. Rather, one finds all-too-brief allusions to various mythologems, the latter of which were obviously familiar to the Egyptian scribes and their intended audience—in this case, the Pharaoh himself and his inner circle. It is only in much later texts that something approaching a coherent narrative can be found. In medical texts from the first millennium BCE, for example, there are various magical spells telling of Horus's trials and tribulations during his infancy. There the greatest of the gods is represented as a cowering, sniveling fledgling, hiding in the marshes at Khemmis in order to avoid the murderous intentions of Set. Thus, in a text designed to combat scorpion bites Isis is made to announce:

"I concealed the child, hiding him for fear of what that 'Cursed One' (i.e., Seth) would do. I left him there [alone] and wandered about as a beggar woman, [disguising myself] out of fear of the evil doer."[426]

As fate would have it, a scorpion bit Horus while his mother was wandering abroad and he was overcome by a terrible sensation of burning. A medical papyrus describes the situation as follows:

"Horus was a child in the nest. A fire befell his limbs."[427]

Upon returning and finding her infant son sorely afflicted by the scorpion's poison, Isis was grief-stricken. At that point she took the babe in her arms and started jumping about frantically: "She seized him in her embrace, leaping about with him like fishes that have been put on a fire."[428]

[426] R.T. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959), pp. 188-189.
[427] J. Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 132.
[428] R. T. Clark, *op. cit*., p. 190.

As Horus lies writhing in agony, the world is thrown into confusion and darkness prevails. Clark describes the dire situation as follows:

"Darkness will cover everything…Wells are dry, crops wither, vegetation is withheld from mankind, until Horus recovers—to his mother's delight."[429]

Horus's plight and Isis's frantic efforts to revive him form the subject of numerous spells designed to treat scorpion bites and ward off the effects of fever. The fact that Isis eventually succeeded in nursing the future king of the gods back to health led her to be viewed as a healer and guarantor of kingship. And as the one who was healed or revived, Horus became the exemplary model for patients and those who sought to be revived or otherwise transformed. Thus it is that magical cippi celebrating Horus commonly include a spell that begins as follows: "The aged god who rejuvenates himself at his season, the old man who becomes a youth."[430]

What are we to make of these peculiar traditions? Although they read like nursery tales composed for children, the Egyptian magical texts likely preserve vestigial mythologems of great antiquity, as evidenced by the fact that the Pyramid and Coffin Texts also allude to the mysterious events at Khemmis.[431] Certainly Isis's hiding of Horus recalls Aphrodite's hiding of Adonis, Phaon, and Phaethon. Horus's capacity for rejuvenation, similarly, we would compare to the magical rejuvenations experienced by Mars, Phaon, Melqart, and Motseyoef. Isis's wandering about as a beggar woman, likewise, forms a close structural analogue to the archetypal mourning goddess, the latter typically described as wandering about the world with disheveled hair and tattered clothes (as in Aphrodite's mourning for Adonis, for example).[432]

Especially significant is the strange scene wherein Isis and Horus are described as leaping about as if put to fire. We would compare this vignette to Apollodorus's account of Melikertes' fiery demise, wherein Ino, upon being stricken with a great madness, plunged the youth into a seething

[429] *Ibid*., p. 192.
[430] R. Ritner, "Horus on the Crocodiles," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 111.
[431] PT 1214 and CT 148, for example.
[432] On the mourning goddess, see E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 97-101.

kettle of water and leapt into the sea together with the infant.[433] Analogous accounts of a great goddess and her infant son being burned and leaping about together will be found around the globe.

[433] Apollodorus 3:4:3.

Achieving Akh-dom:
Or Mysterium Coniunctionis Writ Large

In order to clarify the historical context and multivalent symbolism associated with the myth of the dying god and his apotheosis as the Morning Star, it is instructive to consider the Egyptian funerary texts, wherein the ascent and transfiguration of the deceased king *as a star* forms an *idée fixe*. Beginning with the pyramid of Unis, Egyptian scribes engraved sacred spells on pyramid walls in order to aid the king on his journey to the celestial Hereafter. The Coffin Texts, which take their name from the fact that they were originally inscribed on the lids of coffins, served a similar purpose and, although slightly later in date, still preserve many of the same archaic spells verbatim. Reflecting religious beliefs from at least the beginning of the third millennium BC—and likely much earlier still—the Pyramid and Coffin Texts thus offer a unique opportunity to confront mankind's earliest conceptions of the cosmos, the gods, and the Hereafter.

A central theme in the Pyramid Texts is the deceased king's hope that he will ascend to the Elysian Fields centered on the Sun. In a passage quoted earlier, the king compares himself to Horus: "Rêœ has [taken (?)] me to himself, to the sky, to the eastern side of the sky; As this Horus, as the dweller in the Netherworld, As this star which illumines the sky."[434]

That the "star which illumines the sky" was the Morning Star is supported by a wealth of evidence. In several passages, in fact, the ascending king is expressly identified with the Morning Star: "O King, may you ascend as the Morning Star, may you be rowed as the Lake-dweller."[435]

In ascending to heaven the deceased king hoped to become a transfigured spirit. The term for this transfigured "soul" was *akh*, and thus the deceased king is described as "one who has gone

[434] PT 362.
[435] PT 871.

to become *akh*."[436] Jan Assmann has written as follows on the sacred terminology surrounding the Egyptian "soul":

"The Egyptian language has a specific word for this 'other' state of being: *å*Δ (*akh*), which is usually rendered as 'spirit' and 'spirit-state.' The phonetic root *(j)å*Δ conveys the basic meanings of 'light,' 'brightness' and 'radiance.' The feminine form *å*Δ*t* (*akhet*) designates that 'radiant place' in the heavens where the sun rises and sets, but also the 'land of the blessed' to which the deceased journey after death."[437]

As Assmann points out, the specific site of the *akh's* transfiguration—the *å*Δ*t* or *akhet*—is also the site of the sunrise and it is to this celestial "land of the blessed" that the deceased king is implored to ascend: "May you ascend to the *akhet*." The express purpose of the funerary procession, therefore, was "to let the god ascend to his horizon [*akhet*]."[438]

As the deceased king hopes to "become *akh* in the *å*Δ*t*" so, too, is much the same said of Horus. Thus one hymn addresses the *akhet* as follows: "Horus has become *akh* through you, in your identity of the *å*Δ*t* from which the Sun emerges."[439]

Essential to the symbolism of the post-mortem ascent to heaven is the king's wish to be reunited with the Mother Goddess, alternately personified as Hathor, Nut, or Isis. Thus it is that a primary goal of the Egyptian king's ascent is to enter the "Mansion of Horus" and coalesce with Hathor.[440] The return to the Mother Goddess is expressed as follows in the Coffin Texts: "The doors of the sky are opened because of your goodness; may you ascend and see Hathor."[441] The same basic idea is apparent in the following passage from the Pyramid Texts: "He shall ascend to the Mansion of Horus which is in the sky."[442] (It will be noticed here that Hathor's name

[436] J. Allen, "The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts," in J. Allen et al eds., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 2.
[437] J. Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 136-137.
[438] *Ibid*., p. 137.
[439] PT 585a as quoted from J. Allen, *op. cit*., p. 19.
[440] E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 175-177.
[441] CT 181b.
[442] PT 1027.

signifies "House of Horus," and hence the king's ascent to the Mansion of Horus implies a return to Hathor. With respect to the passage in question, Raymond Faulkner observed: "The original *Ówt-Ór* 'Mansion of Horus' has to be taken as the name of the goddess."[443])

Upon ascending to and reuniting with the Mother Goddess the king hoped to be rejuvenated and gain everlasting life as a radiant star-like body—the aforementioned *akh*. After achieving *akh*-dom, the deceased would reside forevermore amongst the stars, the latter known as *akh-akh*.[444] And as Horus himself was thought to reside amongst the Imperishable Stars so, too, did the deceased king aspire to the same stellar destiny. Thus the Pyramid Texts describe the king as an "imperishable" *akh*, or *åΔj j.ΔmΩk*, an explicit reference to the Imperishable Stars.[445] This idea is most apparent in a text from Pepi I's pyramid, wherein Nut is invoked as follows:

"May you akhify this Pepi inside you, and he will not die…A great thing has happened in the sky, for you have taken control, become powerful, and filled every space with your beauty. The entire land is under you, for you have acquired it. You have encircled the land and everything within your arms, and have placed this Pepi as an Imperishable Star that is in you."[446]

The king's transfiguration at the hands of the Mother Goddess forms a central mystery in a number of Egyptian rituals. The idea is especially prominent in funerary practices, wherein the coffin itself was assimilated to the body of the Mother Goddess. Thus it is that the Pyramid Texts compare placement in the coffin to reunion with the goddess Nut:

"You are given to your mother, Nut, in her identity of the coffin, She has gathered you up, in her identity of sarcophagus, You are ascended to her, in her identity of the tomb."[447]

During the process of interment the king was conceptualized as being implanted within the body of the Mother Goddess, wherein it was expected that he would be rejuvenated. In discussing the

[443] R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Oxford, 2004), p. 300.
[444] D. van der Plas & J. Borghouts, *Coffin Texts Word Index* (Utrecht, 1998), p. 5.
[445] PT 152. See here the discussion in J. Allen, "The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts," in J. Allen et al eds., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 4.
[446] PT 782 as quoted from J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 103.
[447] PT 616-d-f.

multivalent symbolism attached to the coffin, Assmann notes that it implied a *regressus ad uterum*:

"'I shall bear thee anew, rejuvenated,' exclaims the sky-goddess to the deceased in one of many such texts inscribed on or in nearly every coffin and tomb. 'I have spread myself over thee, I have born thee again as a god.' Through this rebirth, the deceased becomes a star-god, a member of the *AKH*-sphere, a new entity. This rebirth, however, does not imply a delivery, a separation, but takes place inside the mother's tomb, inside the coffin and sky."[448]

The fact that the deceased king is transfigured *within* Nut confirms her intimate and fundamental relationship to the *akhet*, for it is within the latter that the king is transfigured and achieves *akh*-dom. Thus it is no surprise to find Nut being invoked as the "Grand Akhet."[449]

Summarizing the archaic Egyptian traditions with respect to the deceased king's translation to heaven we can identify the central themes as follows: (1) the king was identified with a star—the Morning Star Horus; (2) the king's transfiguration was thought to occur within the *akhet*, a radiant "land of the blessed" located in the circumpolar region of the sky; (3) the king's transfiguration was effected by the Mother Goddess, who was conceptualized as conferring youth, beauty, and power on the deceased king; (4) the king's transfiguration involved a *mysterium coniunctionis* with the Mother Goddess.

At this point the question arises as to how such peculiar beliefs could have originated. Why would the Egyptian king seek to emulate Horus in ascending to heaven—as a star, no less—and conjoining with the Mother Goddess? And why would the king expect to be "transfigured" *within her womb* even if he could accomplish this most unlikely postmortem transmigration? The answer, presumably, is for the same reason that the ancient Egyptians did anything deemed to be of a sacred nature—to commemorate Creation by emulating or re-enacting a cosmic prototype, in this case the primeval ascent and transfiguration of Horus as

[448] J. Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 140.
[449] B. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman, 1992), p. 26.

the Morning Star. For whatever Horus did *in illo tempore* the king hoped to emulate in his life on earth *and* in his afterlife.

Figure four

What, then, do we know about an ascent of Horus in *Tep Zepi*, the Time of Beginnings? Horus's ascent to heaven forms a prominent theme in Egyptian cosmogonical traditions and is alluded to throughout the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, as we have documented. A spell from the Coffin Texts describing Horus's birth is especially instructive here, insofar as it provides a rich description of the god's ascent to heaven at the Dawn of Time. In the text in question, Isis is pregnant with Horus and remains hidden in the marshes at Khemmis (see figure four). The extraordinary power and beauty of the Horus-embryo is a point of emphasis. After emerging from his mother's womb and ascending to heaven, the falcon god boasts that he has surpassed the other gods and flown to heaven in order to assume his divine prerogative as Universal King:

"I am Horus, the Falcon who is on the battlements of the Mansion of Him whose name is hidden. My flight aloft has reached the horizon [*akhet*], I have overpassed the gods of the sky, I have made my position more prominent than that of the Primeval Ones…I have used the roads of eternity to the dawn, I go up in my flight, and there is no god who can do what I have done."[450]

It will be noticed here that Horus's primeval flight takes him to the *akhet*, the very region associated with the king's postmortem ascent and transfiguration.

[450] CT 148:223-224.

In a subsequent passage from the same text Isis announces her intention to glorify her as yet unborn son by naming him: "Come and go forth and I shall give you glory…and I will make your name when you have reached the horizon, having passed over the battlements of the (Mansion of) Him-whose-name-is-hidden."[451]

Mordechai Gilula, in his commentary on this important text, emphasized the concrete nature of this "naming" of the god within the *akhet*:

"'Name' here should be taken literally and not figuratively as an equivalent of 'glory'. In other words, Horus will be given his name after his first flight."[452]

Insofar as Horus's reign as King of the Gods formed the celestial role model for Egyptian kings, it is only fitting that coronation texts liken the pharaoh's acquisition of *akh*-power to Horus's empowerment at the breast of Isis/Hathor in Khemmis. In a coronation hymn from the time of Queen Hatshepsut, for example, Hathor is made to announce:

"I have come to you, (my) beloved daughter Hatshepsut…to permeate your majesty with life and well-being, as (I) did for Horus in the papyrus thicket of Khemmis. (I) have suckled your majesty at (my) breast, (I) have filled you with my effective power…(I) have created your beauty. (I) have come to be your protection and to cause you to taste of my milk, that you might live and endure by means of it."[453]

Evident here is the belief that Hathor's imbuing of Horus with her *akh*-power—here translated as "effective power"—represented the mythical prototype for the empowerment *and* beautification of the Egyptian pharaoh. Such traditions are archaic in nature and of archetypal import.

An early Coffin Text also alludes to Hathor's empowerment and beautification of Horus:

[451] CT 148: 219-220 as translated in M. Gilula, "An Egyptian Etymology of the Name of Horus?," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 57 (1971), p. 261.
[452] *Ibid*., p. 261.
[453] Quoted from J. Assmann, *op. cit*, pp. 133-134.

"Becoming Hathor. I am Hathor who brings her Horus and who proclaims her Horus; and my heart is the lion-god…I have appeared as Hathor, the Primeval, the Lady of All, living in truth; I am the uraeus who lives on truth, who lifts up the faces of all the gods, and all the gods are beneath my feet. I am she who displays his [Horus, according to Faulkner] beauty and assembles his powers, I am that Eye of Horus…Truly I am She who made his name."[454]

The pharaoh's empowerment is elsewhere likened to Horus's primeval ascent as a divine falcon. Witness the following coronation text from the reign of Thutmosis III:

"He opened for me the door-leaves of heaven and unfolded the gates of his horizon. I rose to heaven as a divine falcon and saw his secret image in heaven…Re himself established me by distinguishing me with the crowns on his head, his Uraeus remaining at my forehead. I was furnished with his *akh*-power and acquainted with the wisdom of the gods like Horus."[455]

In the present text, as in the Coffin Text celebrating Hathor's empowerment of Horus, the king's powers are ascribed to the uraeus adorning his head as a crown. Now here is a curious idea: Why would the king's transfiguration in heaven be linked to a uraeus-serpent?

On this matter there is little room for doubt, as the Egyptian sources make it abundantly clear that the uraeus is indistinguishable from the Mother Goddess herself and thus it naturally shares her function as a transfigurer of kings. A Pyramid Text describing the king's ascent to heaven confirms the identification:

"I have laid down for myself this sunshine of yours as a stairway under my feet on which I will ascend to the mother of mine, the living uraeus which should be upon me, O Rêœ. She will have compassion on me and will give me her breast that I may suck it."[456]

Yet if the Mother Goddess is to be identified as the planet Venus, as per the thesis defended here, one must expect to find that the latter planet was conceptualized as a serpent-dragon. And such

[454] CT IV:172-173.
[455] J. Assmann, *op. cit*., p. 142.
[456] PT 1108-1109.

is indeed the case. Thus Sumerian hymns describe Inanna/Venus as the "First Snake" or as a raging dragon spewing forth fire.[457] In aboriginal Africa, likewise, it was said of Venus that it could "also transform herself into a serpent."[458] In South America Star Woman—as the planet Venus—was given the epithet "Mother of Snakes."[459]

In addition to embodying the Mother Goddess, the uraeus is identified with the crown and the Eye of Horus. Thus, in an early hymn to the crown, the deceased king compares himself to Horus encircled by his eye:

"He [the king] has come to you, O *Nt*-crown; he has come to you, O Fiery Serpent…He has come to you, O Great of Magic, for he is Horus encircled with the protection of his Eye, O Great of Magic…Grant that the dread of me be like the dread of you; grant that the fear of me be like the fear of you…If Ikhet the Great has borne you, Ikhet the Serpent has adorned you; If Ikhet the Serpent has borne you, Ikhet the Great has adorned you, Because you are Horus encircled with the protection of his Eye."[460]

It will be noticed that the uraeus-serpent is here named Ikhet, the very name otherwise associated with the locus of the king's transfiguration (Ikhet=*Akhet*). We have now come full circle in our attempt to decode the specific celestial context of the king's transfiguration. If the uraeus is identical with the *akhet and* fundamentally indistinguishable from the Mother Goddess, it follows that the Mother Goddess herself was the *akhet* and thus responsible for transfiguring or "akhifying" the king. The same conclusion follows from Nut's epithet "Great Akhet." We thus arrive at the following series of equations: *Akhet*=radiant Land of the Blessed=place of transfiguration=uraeus= Eye of Horus=Mother Goddess. It is our view that each and every one of these numen-laden entities is fundamentally synonymous with the planet Venus.

To recap our findings to this point: The central theme of the Egyptian Pyramid Texts was the king's post-mortem ascent to heaven as a star-like being. Upon reaching heaven it was expected

[457] Betty Meador, *Inanna: Lady of the Largest Heart* (Austin, 2000), p. 96, writes: "muß-sag-kal is a mythological creature, the first or primary or archetypal snake."
[458] H. von Sicard, "Karanga Stars," *NADA* 19 (1943), p. 50.
[459] J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chamacoco Indians* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 84.
[460] PT 195-198.

that he would be "transfigured" or "akhified" within the *akhet*. More specifically, the transfiguration of the deceased pharaoh was thought to occur *within the body* of the Mother Goddess and to involve his rejuvenation and beautification, a process that necessarily entailed his catasterization and "investment" with luminous splendor.

It is our contention that this archaic belief-system was originally inspired by a singular and spectacular historical event—Mars' metamorphosis in appearance while in conjunction with Venus. The transfiguration or "akhification" of the deceased king, therefore, is to be understood as a mythologized interpretation of Horus's transfiguration at the hands of Nut/Hathor/Venus, now projected into the future and humanized as a post-mortem translation to heaven. The apotheosis and transfiguration of Horus/Mars can thus be seen as forming an Egyptian analogue to Dumuzi's apotheosis and transfiguration at the hands of Inanna/Venus.

Heracles: Hêros Theos

"Heracles is not only the most important of heroes, he is also the most difficult to reconstruct."[461]

The most famous hero of the ancient world was the Greek Heracles. Renowned as the "Strong Man" defending the gods, Heracles was also worshipped as a god. Insofar as the manifold traditions surrounding the Greek strongman offer the most complete portrait we have of the warrior hero, it stands to reason that his cult is bound to illuminate certain aspects of the mythological themes treated in this monograph.

As a case in point, consider the hero's fiery death on the funeral pyre at Mt. Oeta.[462] Our primary source for this particular tradition is Sophocles' oft-macabre *The Trachiniae.* There it is related that Heracles was driven to commit suicide because his body was corroding away as a result of donning a robe laced with the Hydra's poison, the latter a gift from Deianeira. A pitiable and pathetic figure by the end of the play, Heracles is made to proclaim: "Glued to my sides, it [the garment] hath eaten my flesh to the inmost parts…already it hath drained my fresh life-blood, and my whole body is wasted."[463]

Sophocles himself is known to have had a penchant for reviving ancient cults and myths and thus it is possible that his description of the hero's fiery demise preserves archaic motifs.[464] That there was, in fact, a ritual celebrating Heracles' cremation has only recently been confirmed. In 1920, archaeologists working at a site upon Mt. Oeta discovered effigy-like figurines of the great hero that had apparently been subjected to repeated firings.[465] Judging from the artifacts found at the site, the cult persisted from at least the 6th century BCE well into Roman times.[466]

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[461] G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (New York, 1974), p. 176.
[462] First attested, apparently, in the Hesiodic Catalogues. See here the Hesiodic Fragments 25.20-33.
[463] 1051-1057.
[464] S. Woodford, "Cults of Heracles in Attica," in *Studies Presented to George M. A. Hanfmann* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 220.
[465] H. Shapiro, "*Heros Theos*: The Death and Apotheosis of Herakles," *Classical World* 77:1 (1983), p. 15.
[466] J. Croon, "Artemis Thermia and Apollo Thermios (With an excursus on the Oetean Heracles-Cult)," *Mnemosyne* 9 (1956), p. 212. J. Boardman, "Heracles in Extremis," in K. Schauenberg, *Studien zur Mythologie*

Following the discovery of the Oetean cult, Nilsson drew the now generally accepted conclusion that the archaic rite had given rise to the myth of the hero's cremation:

"Such a bonfire was kindled on the top of Mount Oeta and the figure burned on the pyre was called Heracles. This is proved by early inscriptions and statuettes of Heracles. So the myth of Heracles' death in the flames of the pyre on Mount Oeta was created and connected with the magnificent but late myth of Deianeira."[467]

The fact that analogous myths and rites will be found around the globe—witness the Aztec myth of Nanahuatl, recounted in chapter nine—argues against the hypothesis that Heracles' cremation was inspired by a local Greek ritual. Nilsson's hypothesis, in any case, would still leave unexplained the historical stimulus behind the origin of the ritual itself. It is our opinion that there is a more economical and logical explanation for the curious rites on Mt. Oeta: the ritual *and* myth were originally inspired by the hero's fiery "death" as witnessed in the skies overhead.

In our discussion of the Star Woman myth we documented that a recurring motif finds the mortal paramour being "rejuvenated" or deified as a result of cremation or boiling. Such myths appear to inform various Greek artworks that show a "rejuvenated" Heracles in the wake of his cremation on Mt. Oeta (see figure five). John Boardman describes three Attic vases from about 470-450 BCE depicting Heracles' apotheosis and rejuvenation:

"On two of the three Attic vases with the pyre and chariot Herakles is shown as a young man…The young Herakles has clearly been rejuvenated by his experience in the pyre and leaves behind only the muscle-corselet. It is difficult not to take this piece of armour, which appears on all three vases, as an indication of the mortality which Herakles has shed, as a snake sloughs its skin. The concept is one which occupies later writers and was perhaps somehow made explicit in other works of art…Whatever the service of the pyre in burning away his mortality and

und Vasenmalerei (Berlin, 1986), p. 129 would place the origin of the Oetean cult "long before the sixth century."

[467] M. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (New York, 1963), p. 205.

whatever its possible debts to eastern beliefs and practices…the concept does seem to determine this feature on the Classical vases."[468]

Figure five

The image of Heracles shedding his muscle-corselet recalls the old man in Papuan lore, sloughing off his scabs in the wake of a fiery rejuvenation through the magic of Star Woman/Venus. The resemblance between the two figures is also supported by the fact that the Greek strongman himself is said to have suffered from scabs—hence the proverb "the itch of Heracles."[469]

A complementary tradition has Heracles being rejuvenated by Hera after his experience on Mt. Oeta. According to Diodorus, it was Hera who first received the Greek strongman in heaven after his death and promptly "redelivered" him.[470] Early vase paintings, with apparent reference to this tradition, show the Greek strongman as an infant at Hera's breast (see figure six).

[468] J. Boardman, "Herakles in Extremis," in K. Schauenberg ed., *Studien zur Mythologie und Vasenmalerei* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 128-129.
[469] J. Frazer, *op. cit*., p. 209, citing Apostolius, viii 68; Zenobius vi 49; and Plutarch, *Proverbia Alexandrinorum*, 21.
[470] IV:39:2.

Figure six

Heracles' cremation and subsequent rejuvenation must call to mind the Phoenician rites of Melqart and, in fact, the identification of the two gods is abundantly attested in the ancient sources.[471] At the Phoenician colony at Gades, the so-called Herakleion gates featured an illustration of Melqart's cremation. According to the testimony of Silius Italicus, the artwork showed "the burning of the hero, with 'the great soul soaring up in flames to the stars'."[472] In fact, it was because of his rejuvenation by means of cremation that Nonnos compared the

[471] Herodotus 2:44. The two gods are also identified in a second century BCE bilingual inscription from Malta: KAI 47.

[472] Silius Italicus III, 32-44 as cited in J. Tsirkin, "The Labours, Death and Resurrection of Melqart as Depicted in the Gates of the Gades' Herakleion," *Revista di Studi Fenici* 9 (1981), pp. 21-22. See also M. Smith, "The death of 'dying and rising gods' in the Biblical world," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998), p. 282.

Phoenician Heracles to the Phoenix: "He sheds old age in the fire, and from fire takes in exchange youthful bloom."[473]

Walter Burkert, upon surveying the evidence attesting to the fundamental affinity of the two gods, confessed his inability to explain the ancient testimony:

"There is the well-known identification of Herakles with Melqart of Tyre, which, although its basis remains unclear to us, was taken for granted for many centuries. Was the basis primarily the gods' role in colonisation, or the fact that both were immortalised through fire?"[474]

It is the identification of the Greek strongman with the Babylonian god Nergal—securely attested during the Greco-Roman period[475]—that provides the answer to Burkert's query, the same identification distinguishing the Phoenician Melqart. And as Nergal was identified with the planet Mars so, too, was the Greek strongman identified with the red planet in Hellenistic sources.[476] The fundamental affinity of Heracles and Melqart, therefore, stems from the fact that both gods, like Nergal, originated as personifications of the planet Mars.

[473] *Dionysiaca*, XL: 394-398.
[474] W. Burkert, "Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels," in J. Bremmer ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (Totowa, 1986), p. 17.
[475] F. Wiggermann, "Nergal," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol. 9* (Berlin, 1999), p. 218 notes that "In the Graeco-Roman period, N[ergal] is assimilated to Heracles at Palmyra, Hatra, and Tarsos."
[476] Scholiast to A.R. III.1378; Pliny *HN* II.34; Hyginus *PA* II.42; Servius *Aen*. VIII.275.

Attendant of the Mother Goddess

One of the more peculiar traditions surrounding Heracles maintains that he once served as Demeter's temple attendant. Pausanias (ca. 150 CE) is our witness for this tradition:

"By the sea at Mykalessos is a sanctuary of Mykalessian Demeter; they say that this is shut every night and opened again by Herakles, and that this Herakles is one of the Idaian Daktyloi."[477]

Pausanias's report that a dwarf-like Heracles served as a doorkeeper to Demeter offers an intriguing thematic parallel to Hesiod's Phaethon, the youthful *dáimõn* snatched up by Aphrodite and made her temple attendant. Far from being an invention of the Magnesian geographer, Heracles' status as a doorkeeper was proverbial in the Greek and Latin world. Thus, Callimachus reports that the Greek strongman replaced Apollo as the gatekeeper of Olympus and that he "stands ever before the gates."[478] The image of Heracles/Mars as the "gatekeeper" of Olympus recalls the fact that Reseph/Mars functioned as gatekeeper of heaven in Ugaritic lore.[479] In fact, it was the general affinity between the two that led the ancients to identify Heracles with the Canaanite war god.[480]

[477] Pausanias 9:19:4 *Pausanias Guide to Greece, Vol. 1* (London, 1979), p. 347.
[478] Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis* 145ff.
[479] J. Sawyer & F. Stephenson, "Literary and Astronomical Evidence for a Total Eclipse of the Sun Observed in Ancient Ugarit on 3 May 1375 B.C.," *BSOAS* 33 (1970), pp. 467-489.
[480] W. K. Schenkel, "Reschef," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie, Volume 5* (Wiesbaden, 1983), p. 244. See also W. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Reßep* (New Haven, 1976), p. 38.

Heracles as Puer

The god as youth, or *puer*, has long fascinated scholars of ancient myth. Carl Jung and Karl Kerényi devoted an entire monograph to the theme, documenting striking parallelisms from around the globe.[481] Jung considered Adonis to be an archetypal example of the *puer*, an opinion that has been endorsed by modern classicists.[482] Invoking the tenets of analytical psychology, Jung viewed the *puer* as being "under the spell of the archetype of the Great Mother," the latter interpreted as a symbol of the unconscious. The fate of the *puer*, according to Robert Segal, is to be drawn "back into [the Great Mother]."[483]

It is probable that the vase-painting depicting Heracles suckling at the breast of Hera reflects archetypal motifs associated with the *puer*. Depictions of an infant boy at the breast of Ishtar are among the most familiar iconographic scenes from the ancient Near East. The same idea is attested in Assyrian cult, where royal youths were raised in the temple of Ishtar and allegedly suckled by the Mother Goddess herself:

"In Assyrian times, royal children were nurtured in the temples of Ishtar, 'almost certainly to be suckled and nursed by hierodules who impersonated the motherly aspects of the goddess,' …A prophecy of Ishtar to the crown prince Assurbanipal says: 'I will carry you on my hip like a nurse, I will put you between my breasts (like) a pomegranate."[484]

The king himself was commonly depicted as a babe at Ishtar's breast. Simo Parpola, among others, has emphasized that the king was deemed to have a special relationship to the Queen of

[481] C. Jung & C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton, 1963).
[482] R. Segal, "Adonis: A Greek Eternal Child," in D. Pozzi & J. Wickersham eds., *Myth and the Polis* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 64-85.
[483] *Ibid*., p. 74.
[484] S. Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52:3 (1993), p. 188.

Heaven: "In her capacity as the goddess of love, Ißtar had a special relationship to the Assyrian king, who is repeatedly portrayed as her baby."[485]

In ancient Egypt as well the king was considered to be the special charge of the Mother Goddess and depicted as a tiny babe at her breast. Thus it is that Isis is the "kingmaker" par excellence by virtue of her suckling of the king (here infantilized as Horus). Jan Assmann summarized the symbolism surrounding the king's relationship to Isis as follows:

"The king steps into the role of the royal child in the constellation of the mother-goddess Isis in order to incorporate the kingship of Horus into himself by means of her milk. In Egypt, the legitimate, salvation-bringing king was not the 'anointed one,' but the 'suckled one.' Many temple reliefs, particularly from the New Kingdom, represent him in this role, in the arms and at the breast of the mother-goddess Isis."[486]

The infantilized form of the Egyptian pharaoh forms a prominent theme in the Pyramid of Unis. In the following spell the deceased pharaoh ascends to the lap of the Great Mother in the circumpolar heavens, whereupon he assumes a diminutive form and is nursed by her:

"Here comes the ascender, here comes the ascender! Here comes the climber, here comes the climber! Here comes he who flew up, here comes he who flew up!…My father Atum seizes my hand for me, And he assigns me to those excellent and wise gods, The Imperishable Stars. O my mother Ipy, give me this breast of yours, that I may apply it to my mouth and suck this your white, gleaming, sweet milk."[487]

The ascending pharaoh is elsewhere addressed as follows: "Is the King the little one yonder?"[488]

In yet another spell the pharaoh is compared to a child-like Horus:

[485] *Ibid*., p. 178.
[486] J. Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 134.
[487] PT 379-381.
[488] PT 392.

"I will ascend and rise up to the sky. Horus the young child; I will ascend and rise up to the sky."[489]

In the reconstruction offered here, the infantilized Unis/Horus forms a structural analogue to the rejuvenated Heracles at the breast of Hera. Both traditions, in our opinion, were originally inspired by Mars' ascent to heaven and conjunction with Venus at the Dawn of Time. Here Mars' unique role in the polar configuration holds the all-important key to understanding the symbolism in question. Being positioned between Earth and Venus, yet sharing the same axis of rotation, it follows that the planet Mars gradually diminished in size as it ascended the axial column and entered into conjunction with the much larger planet Venus—hence its conceptualization as a *puer* or "little one." Computer simulations of the reconstructed events involving appropriately sized "planets," in fact, reveal that the red planet—because of its relatively diminutive size—appears to "enter" Venus when at the apex of its orbit even though it is still quite distant from the latter planet (see the figure on the back cover). It is this particular—*and currently impossible*—image of planetary conjunction that appears to be memorialized in the myth of the beloved *puer* (Adonis, Phaethon, and countless others) as also in the sacred iconography depicting the warrior-hero at the breast of the Queen of Heaven (Heracles, Horus, Dumuzi).[490]

The spectacular conjunction of Venus and Mars gave rise to a myriad of mythical interpretations. If some mythmakers envisaged Mars as an "infant" at the breast of Venus, others viewed the red planet as the Mother Goddess's diminutive attendant or "pupil." Heracles' role as Demeter's dwarf-like doorkeeper likely has reference to Mars' miniaturized appearance while in conjunction with Venus. A similar symbolism attaches to the Egyptian Horus who, like Heracles, was represented as a dwarf—hence their mutual assimilation to Bes.[491] In perfect keeping with this imagery, the Pyramid Texts compare the deceased king to a dwarf upon his ascending to heaven and conjoining with the mother goddess Nut. Thus it is that the Egyptian

[489] PT 1320.
[490] See here the discussion in D. Talbott, *Symbols of an Alien Sky* (Beaverton, 1997), p. 85 and throughout.
[491] E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 146-157.

pharaoh Pepi—explicitly identified with Horus—was described as follows: "He is a dwarf of the god's dances, an entertainer before his [great] seat."[492]

As the *puer* was conceived to be under the "spell" of the Mother Goddess—or drawn back into the Great Mother, according to Segal—so, too, did ancient skywatchers view Mars' ascent and conjunction with Venus as the warrior-hero's return to the womb of Venus. Attested around the globe, this idea is especially prominent in ancient Egypt, where it forms a recurring theme in funerary rites.[493] Henri Frankfort offers the following discussion of the king's transfiguration in ancient Egypt:

"The king desired to enter the body of the goddess Nut in order to be reborne by her, and there are indications…that these texts may possibly convey that the king entered the body of the mother-goddess by means of sympathetic magic, using an object which had come forth from her."[494]

[492] PT 1189 as translated in J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 159.
[493] J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2005), p. 172 writes: "Death as return to the womb was a central concept, one that extended into every area of Egyptian culture."
[494] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), p. 365.

Heracles and Hera

It has long been a truism in comparative religion that it is difficult to comprehend a deity's original nature without an adequate etymology of his or her name. Alternatively, it would seem to follow that once a deity's name is deciphered valuable insight has thereby been gained into that particular figure's fundamental nature and original sphere of activity. In the case of the Greek Zeus, to take a well-known example, the relationship of his name to the Indo-European root **Dyew*—"Bright Sky"—clearly marks the god as celestial in nature.[495] Investigations into the origins of Zeus's cult, accordingly, must take this celestial aspect into account in order to be credible.

The original significance of Heracles' name has long been a subject of interest amongst scholars. Kretschmer claimed the name signified the "glory acquired through Hera."[496] Dumezil translated the name Heracles as "he who owes his glory (*kleos*) to Hera."[497] Nagy offered a slightly different etymology, rendering the name as "he who has the *kleos* of Hera."[498] In short, there would appear to be a general consensus amongst scholars that the hero's name contains reference to Hera and that his "glory" was a gift of the goddess. But how are we to understand the mytho-historical circumstances whereby Heracles was imbued with the "glory" of Hera?

[495] J. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 130.
[496] Glotta VIII (1917), pp. 121-126 as cited in E. Suhr, "Herakles and Omphale," *American Journal of Archaeology* 57:4 (1953), p. 258.
[497] G. Dumézil, *The Stakes of the Warrior* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 127.
[498] G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, 1979), p. 303.

Venus's Glory

As the Queen of Heaven, Hera naturally recalls the celebrated goddesses from the ancient Near East—Inanna, Ishtar, and Astarte—each of whom was identified with the planet Venus. Hera herself was identified with the same planet during the Hellenistic period, likely under influence from the ancient Near East.[499] Hence there is some justification for asking whether the various mythical relations between Heracles and Hera reflect some sort of interaction between Mars and Venus?

In the sacred literature of Mesopotamia the awe-inspiring "splendor" or "glory" of the planet Venus is a recurring theme. The following description of Inanna/Venus from the marriage hymn of Iddin-Dagan (ca. 1900 BCE) is representative in this regard:

"To the great queen of heaven, Inanna, I want to address my greeting, to her who fills the sky with her pure blaze, to the luminous one, to Inanna, as bright as the sun, to the great queen of heaven, Inanna, I want to address my greeting, to the hierodule, the queen of the Anunna, decked in splendor, to the princess, who fills heaven and earth with her great radiance."[500]

Noteworthy here is the fact that the "splendor" or "radiance" of Inanna/Venus is said to span the heavens and rival the sun in brilliance, hardly an apt description of the planet Venus familiar to modern astronomers. Incongruous or not, the ancient texts are adamant about this point: the luminous "splendor" of Venus dominated the sky and was a mesmerizing source of awe and terror for terrestrial skywatchers. An early hymn known as "The Exaltation of Inanna" attests to

[499] Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Cosmos*, 2.28 (392a). See also K. Kerényi, *Goddesses of Sun and Moon* (Dallas, 1979), p. 59; W. Roscher, "Planeten," in W. Roscher ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884-1937), cols. 2518-2540.
[500] D. Reisman, "Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 25 (1973), pp. 186-189.

the dread inspired by the planet's radiant power: "To provoke shivers of fright, panic, trembling, and terror before the halo of your fearsome splendor, that is in your nature, oh Inanna!"[501]

Inanna's splendor plays a central role in ancient myth and ritual. Thus it is that the sacred marriage rite saw the king being imbued with the luminous splendor or "glory" of the planet-goddess. This idea is evident in the following passage from the Old Babylonian hymn BM 96739, cited earlier:

"Oh Inanna, a husband worthy of your splendor has been granted to you…You, oh mistress, you have handed over to him your power as is due to a king, and Ama-ušumgal-anna causes a radiant brilliance to burst out for you."[502]

Far from being unique to ancient Mesopotamia, the idea that the planet Venus conferred "glory" or power on kings or heroes is apparently universal in nature. In ancient Persian coronation ritual it is the goddess Anahita—specifically identified with the planet Venus—who invests the king with his regal glory and provides him with his crown.[503] Thus, Anahita is invoked as the "granter of sovereignty and glory" in the Avestan *Aban Yasht*.[504] The same planet-goddess is credited with providing "strength" to the heroes of primeval times.[505]

The greatest hero in Persian lore was Thraetona, often likened to Heracles. Thraetona is said to have rescued the world from destruction by enveloping himself in the *hvarenah*, the luminous "glory" that empowered heroes in their mythical adventures.[506] Persian kings, in a purposeful attempt to emulate Thraetona, sought to provide themselves with the selfsame "glory" in order to rule in power: "In assuming the throne, however, he [the Great King] took unto himself the

[501] Quoted from F. Bruschweiler, *Inanna. La déesse triomphante et vaincue dans la cosmologie sumérienne* (Leuven, 1988), p. 118.
[502] *Ibid*., p. 110.
[503] Y. Ustinova, "Aphrodite Urania," *Kernos* 11 (1998), p. 218.
[504] XII, 46; XIII, 50.
[505] A. Carnoy, "Iranian," in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), p. 279.
[506] A. Carnoy, "Iranian Views of Origins in Connection with Similar Babylonian Beliefs," *Journal of American Oriental Studies* 36 (1917), p. 308.

mystique, spirit and glory of kingship: tradition has it that he was crowned on his birthday, at which event he was thought to be reborn, and thus, assumed a throne name."[507]

As for how we are to understand the archetypal motif whereby a hero or king is invested with the "glory" of the planet Venus the Saturn theory offers a perfectly elegant and logical solution (see http://www.mavericksscience.com/saturn.htm). Given the peculiar order and structure of the polar configuration, wherein the planet Mars was stationed *between* Earth and Venus, it follows that the red planet would become enveloped or "invested" with the splendor or "glory" of the Queen of Heaven during a close conjunction of the two planets. Thus it is, we propose, that Dumuzi obtained the luminous "glory" of Inanna/Venus by conjoining with or "marrying" the planet-goddess. And thus it is that Heracles acquired the "glory" of Hera, the latter goddess being identifiable with the planet Venus. Recall again Nagy's etymology of the hero's name: "he who has the *kleos* [glory] of Hera."[508] As an apparent testament to Mars' investiture during its memorable conjunction with Venus/Hera, the hero's name is perfectly descriptive and straightforward.

[507] T. Young, "The consolidation of the empire and its limits of growth under Darius and Xerxes," in J. Boardman et al eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History IV* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 105. See also B. Alster, "The Paradigmatic Character of Mesopotamian Heroes," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archeologie orientale* 68 (1974), p. 51: "Where tradition is still more or less a living thing, great monarchs consider themselves imitators of the primordial hero: Darius saw himself as a new Thraetona."
[508] G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, 1979), p. 303.

Heracles Astrokhiton

A curious epithet, preserved by Nonnos of Panopolis, describes Heracles as *astrokhitôn*—"dressed in star(s)."[509] How are we to understand this moniker?

A telling clue is provided by early mythological traditions describing Dumuzi's transfiguration by Inanna. Recall again the passage from the Old Babylonian hymn BM 96739, wherein Inanna/Venus confers her power on Dumuzi:

"Mistress of Heaven, your power you have conferred upon him, the king; Dumuzi therefore shines in luminous splendor…You have clothed him with a divine garment resembling your own…[Dumuzi] has clothed himself with a divine garment just like yours."[510]

Now here is a strange situation—a supposedly "mortal" king is transfigured and empowered by adopting the garment or "clothing" of the Venus-star. Helgard Balz-Cois offered the following commentary on this remarkable state of affairs:

"Dressed in a 'Divine Garment' the warrior-hero shines forth like a star in heaven: He is as good as identical to his goddess and mistress. The astral aspect, which radiates here in the ideology of kingship, is a sign of the apotheosis of the king."[511]

Precisely. The apotheosis of Dumuzi is fundamentally inseparable from his conjunction with Inanna/Venus—a conjunction which also spells his catasterization. In conjoining with and "marrying" the planet Venus, Dumuzi is invested with her luminous splendor as if by a heaven-

[509] *Dionysiaca* XL, 369-577 throughout.
[510] A. Falkenstein & W. von Soden, *Sumerische und Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Stuttgart, 1953), pp. 74-76. See also J. Black et al., "A tigi to Inana (Inana E)," *ETCSL*, lines 21, 46-47.
[511] H. Balz-Cochois, *Inanna: Wesensbild und Kult einer unmütterlichen Göttin* (Gütersloh, 1992), p. 97: "Bekleidet mit einem 'Götterkleide' erstrahlt der Kriegsheld wie ein Gestirn am Himmel: Er ist seiner Göttin und Herrin so gut wie ebenburtig. Der Astralaspect, der hier in der Königsideologie aufstrahlt, ist Zeichen der *Vergöttlichung* des Königs." Translation courtesy of Birgit Liesching.

spanning garment—a garment of "stars" as it were. The two star-gods are virtually indistinguishable or "as good as identical" because, upon conjoining, they present the appearance of a "Great Star" in heaven—the greatest of all stars in history, in fact (see figure seven).

Figure seven

As Dumuzi/Mars adopted the luminous garment of Inanna/Venus so, too, did Mesopotamian kings choose to outfit themselves with a garment decorated with stars (see figure eight). Thus, of the sacred symbolism associated with regal garments, A. Leo Oppenheim notes that Inanna's star features prominently:

"Among these motives of old standing in Babylonia as well as Assyria ranks first the rosette (with 6 petals basically), known since the oldest periods for its numinous value. The star (with 8 beams basically) appears due to its apotropaic function and its connection with the cult of the foremost goddess of the Mesopotamian pantheon."[512]

[512] A. Oppenheim, "The Golden Garments of the Gods," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949), p. 191.

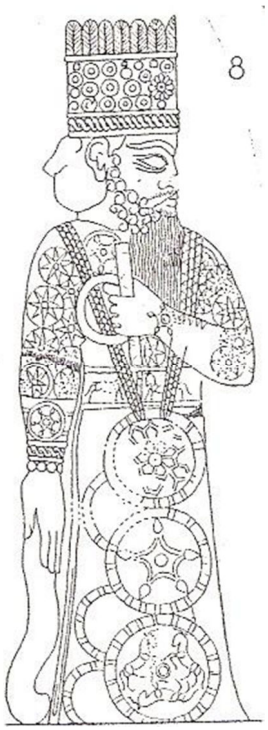

Figure eight

It is essential to emphasize the tangible nature of the king's investiture at the hands of the Mother Goddess—as something actually witnessed by ancient skywatchers around the globe. As Mars entered into conjunction with the much larger Venusian orb, it was deemed to have mounted the celestial throne whereupon it became enveloped by the luminous rays or "glory" of the Mother Goddess (see figure nine). Earthlings viewing this awe-inspiring spectacle imagined a "crowning," "glorification," or investiture of Mars by Venus. In fact, we would suggest that the English word "invest" best describes the imagery inspired by this greatest of all planetary conjunctions. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the following semantic range is associated with the word "invest": (1) to clothe; array, adorn; (2) a) to cover, surround, or envelop like, or as if with, a garment; b) to endow with qualities, attributes, etc.; (3) to install in office with ceremony; (4) to furnish with power, privilege, or authority.[513]

The extraordinary events in question were endlessly commemorated in sacred rites around the globe. As we would expect, an intimate connection between the Mother Goddess and rites of

[513] *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York, 1970), p. 741.

investiture is often evident. It is the Venusian goddess, in fact, who typically invests the king with his throne, crown, and numinous powers. The following Sumerian hymn is representative in this regard: "To give the crown, the throne and the royal sceptre is yours, Inana."[514] A hymn to Inanna and Dumuzi makes a similar claim:

"May the lord whom you have chosen in your heart, the king, your beloved husband, enjoy long days in your holy and sweet embrace! Give him a propitious and famous reign, give him a royal throne of kingship on its firm foundation, give him the scepter to guide the Land, and the staff and crook, and give him the righteous headdress and the crown which glorifies his head!"[515]

An analogous situation is apparent in ancient Egypt. Thus, the Pyramid Texts allude to Isis's investiture of Horus with specific reference to the mysterious events at Khemmis: "Isis—she who tied the headband on her son Horus as a young boy in Akhbit, using her dress and censing before him…"[516]

It was Horus's investiture at the Dawn of Time that provided the mythical prototype for the investiture of the Egyptian king. Thus it is that the various kings for whom the Pyramid Texts were composed are each described as having been invested by the Mother Goddess. The following text from Teti's pyramid is representative in this regard:

"How beautiful is the sight of Teti, with headband from the Sun's brow; his kilt on him from Hathor, his plumage a falcon's plumage, as he goes forth to the sky among his brothers the gods."[517]

That the divine prototype for Teti's investiture is Horus himself is confirmed by another passage from the same pyramid:

[514] J. Black et al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford, 2004), p. 96.
[515] *Idem*, "A song of Inana and Dumuzi (Dumuzid-Inana D1)," lines 34-40, *ETCSL*.
[516] PT 1214 as quoted in J. Allen, *op. cit*., p. 161.
[517] PT 546 as quoted in J. Allen, *op. cit*., p. 70.

"Ho, Teti! Receive your dazzling garment…and get dressed in Horus's eye from Ta'it-Town, and it will make your acclaim with the gods, it will make your recognition with the gods, and you will acquire the crown through it with Horus…Ta'it will clothe you and carry you to the sky in her identity of a kite. The foundling she has found is her Horus."[518]

Notable here is the fact that the deceased king, as Horus, receives the "crown" together with his dazzling garment (and/or his eye).

What was standard procedure in Mesopotamia and Egypt was typical of Mother Goddesses everywhere. In Old Babylonian investiture rituals it was the goddess who placed the crown upon the king.[519] The Canaanite goddess Anat is invoked as "the mistress of the (royal) Headdress" ([*bœ]lt. kpt*) as well as the Queen of Heaven.[520] A Hittite text outlining instructions for building a new palace finds the king offering the following pronouncement: "To me, the king, has the Throne-goddess brought from the sea the (insignia) of power and the chariot."[521]

In ancient India it was the goddess ¸ri who embodied the "glory" and "power" of the king. Of the multiform symbolism associated with this goddess Ananda Coomaraswamy remarked:

"¸ri ('Splendor')-Lakshmi ('Insigne') is the well-known Indian Goddess of Fortune (Tyche), Prosperity (the personified 'Luck' of western folklore) and Beauty: she is the principle and source of all nourishment, kingship, empire, royalty, strength, sacerdotal luster, dominion, wealth, and species, which are appropriated from her by the gods whose distinctive properties they are."[522]

As the goddess of sovereignty, ¸ri was thought to be incarnate in the royal diadem.[523] Now here is an interesting idea: Why would the Mother Goddess be conceptualized as incarnate in the

[518] PT 737-741 as quoted in J. Allen, *op. cit*., p. 85.
[519] T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), p. 109.
[520] 1.108, 6-9 as quoted in N. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth* (Atlanta, 1992), p. 108.
[521] KUB xxix I 17-26 as quoted in N. Wyatt, "Arms and the King," *Studien zum Alten Testament und zum alten Orient* 70 (1998), p. 840.
[522] A. Coomaraswamy, "Loathly Bride," in R. Lipsey ed., *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers* (Princeton, 1977), p. 358.
[523] A. Hiltebeitel, "Draupadi's Hair," *Purasãrtha* 5 (1981), pp. 191-192.

royal diadem? Here, too, we would understand ʾri's affinity with the crown in a completely literal and concrete manner, for it is the planet Venus itself which, in conjoining with and encircling Mars, "crowns" him and invests him with his powers.[524] The symbolism in question is captured perfectly in a Sumerian hymn addressed to Ninmug: "She bears kings by binding the true diadem; She bears lords by instituting the coronation ceremony."[525]

ʾri's intimate association with the "crowning" *and* empowerment of the king, in our view, forms a precise structural analogue to the role of Anahita/Venus in Persian investiture rites as also to the function of Inanna/Venus in Sumerian myth. Isis's investiture of Horus with the royal headband is to be viewed in the same light, as is Ishtar/Venus's epithet *Nin-gir-gi-lum*, signifying "Queen of the Headband."[526] Hathor's manifestation as the uraeus-serpent, the latter of which was responsible for "crowning" and empowering Horus, forms another obvious parallel.

[524] See here the brilliant analysis in D. Talbott, *Symbols of an Alien Sky* (Beaverton, 1997), pp. 92-102.
[525] H. Vanstiphout, "Why did Enki organize the world?," in I. Finkel & M. Geller eds., *Sumerian Gods and Their Representations* (Groningen, 1997), p. 126.
[526] K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (Helsinki, 1938), p. 331.

As Above, So Below

"Everywhere it seems as if popular festivals, when left to propagate themselves freely among the folk, reveal their old meaning and intention more transparently than when they have been adopted into the official religion and enshrined in a ritual. The simple thoughts of our simple forefathers are better understood by their unlettered descendents than by the majority of educated people; their rude rites are more faithfully preserved and more truly interpreted by a rude peasantry than by the priest, who wraps up their nakedness in the gorgeous pall of religious pomp, or by the philosopher, who dissolves their crudities into the thin air of allegory."[527]

We have seen that ancient myths everywhere memorialize the events of Creation and the primeval adventures of the gods, who are the planets. The same is true of sacred rituals, which were designed and performed in accordance with the magical principle "as above, so below." Recall again the summary statement of Mircea Eliade:

"Every ritual has a divine model, an archetype; this fact is well enough known for us to confine ourselves to recalling a few examples. 'We must do what the gods did in the beginning (*Satapatha Brahmana*, VII, 2, 1, 4). 'Thus the gods did; thus men do' (*Taittiriya Brahmana*, I, 5, 9, 4). This Indian adage summarizes all the theory underlying rituals in all countries."[528]

This age-old pattern of thought is especially conspicuous in the case of New Year's rites, which serve to commemorate the primary events of Creation. As Anton Wensinck pointed out, New Year's celebrations are indissolubly connected to cosmogony:

"Not only is each New Year a memorial of the creation but it is a repetition of it, and the creation itself is regarded as a kind of New Year. Indeed the last expression is the right one. New Year belongs to the cosmogony, New Year and Creation are the reflection one of the other."[529]

[527] J. Frazer, *The Scapegoat* (London, 1913), p. 404.
[528] M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959), p. 21.
[529] A. Wensinck, "The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology," *Acta Orientalia* (1923), p. 169.

As a pivotal event of Creation, it stands to reason that the sacred marriage would feature prominently in New Year's rites.[530] In ancient Mesopotamia during the Neo-Sumerian period, the New Year's celebration included a *hieros gamos* involving the Sumerian king (impersonating Dumuzi) and the goddess Inanna (as the planet Venus). In the analogous Skidi ritual celebrated some 4000 years later the sacred marriage between Mars (as the mythical Morning Star) and Venus was said to signal the Creation of the world. A ritual *hieros gamos* was associated with the Morning Star in other lands as well, as we have documented. Thus, in ancient Egypt the Morning Star Horus engaged in a sacred marriage with Hathor (Venus). The South Arabian Morning Star Athtar, likewise, was linked to a *hieros gamos* in ancient Minaean ritual.[531]

The drilling of the sacred fire was a regular feature in ancient New Year's rites. In ancient Babylon, for example, the drilling of a new fire formed a central rite in the New Year's celebration known as Zagmuk.[532]

Similar customs were reported from aboriginal Africa. Among the Sotho-Tswana peoples of South Africa, the drilling of the new fire at New Year's occurred in conjunction with the *hieros gamos*:

"This was a very important fertility feast during which ritual purification took place, a new ceremonial fire was kindled…ritual cohabitation between the chief and his great wife took place, and the relative rank within the tribe was indicated. All fires had to be ritually extinguished during the dead moon."[533]

[530] Of the New Year's rites at Ugarit, Johannes de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites* (Kerken, 1972), p. 6 remarks: "One of the most solemn rites to be performed by the king was the sacred marriage which was concluded at the end of New Year's Day."
[531] M. Höfner, "œAṯtar," in H. Haussig ed., *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 501, citing RÉS 3306.
[532] A. Wensinck, *op. cit*., p. 162.
[533] P. Breutz, "Sotho-Tswana Celestial Concepts," in *Ethnological and Linguistic Studies in Honour of J. van Warmelo* (Pretoria, 1969), p. 205.

In ancient Rome a new fire signaling the New Year was kindled in the temple of Vesta on the first of March, according to Ovid.[534] The latter month was the first in the Roman calendar year and consecrated to the Latin god Mars.

The same rite was also deemed to be especially sacred in the New World. In Mexico the kindling of the new fire featured in all manner of sacred celebrations:

"The drilling of new fire on various ritual occasions, especially dedications of new structures, was very important in the overall ritual pattern. The great new fire ritual at the expiration of the 52-year cycle constituted the most important ceremonial occasion in the entire system."[535]

The Zuni of New Mexico drilled a new fire with every New Year's celebration. Significantly, the origin of the sacred rite was timed to coincide with the appearance of the Morning Star: "The rising of the Morning Star during the winter solstice ceremony marked the time for the kindling of the New Year fire."[536]

For the Zuni, as for the Skidi Pawnee, the drilling of the new fire was believed to promote fertility throughout the land.[537] Why this should be the case is impossible to understand apart from the multivalent symbolism attached to the sacred marriage itself. The drilling of fire was associated with fertility primarily because it formed a structural and functional analogue to the *hieros gamos*, the latter of which was believed to guarantee fertility throughout the land. To be more precise: the drilling of the new fire symbolized the "marriage" of Mars and Venus *in illo tempore*. As the two planets represented the prototypical male and female powers in heaven so, too, does the twirling fire drill represent the prototypical male power (Mars) and the horizontal fire stick or hearth the primal female power (Venus).

[534] Ovid *Fasti* 3, 143ff as cited in H.S. Versnel, "Apollo and Mars One Hundred Years after Roscher," *Visible Religion* 4 (1986), p. 154.
[535] H. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in G. Ekholm & I. Bernal eds., *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica* (Austin, 1971), p. 413.
[536] M. Jane Young, "Morning Star, Evening Star: Zuni Traditional Stories," in R. Williamson & C. Farrer eds., *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 79.
[537] J. Frazer, *Balder the Beautiful* (London, 1963), p. 133.

The drilling of the new fire typically followed a ritually prescribed period of darkness symbolizing the primordial "Night" preceding Creation, the latter memorialized by the extinguishing of all fires. In Skidi lore, this primeval "Darkness" was ascribed to the evil machinations of the planet Venus. Thus, in the myth describing the Morning Star's pursuit of Venus, it is reported that he "traveled in darkness looking for her."[538] The extraordinary nature of the events in question is corroborated by the ritual instructions accompanying the human sacrifice. On such occasions the chief priest impersonating the Martian warrior uttered the following words upon overcoming a series of obstacles placed before him by Venus: "I have destroyed the regions once controlled by the mysterious woman who wanted darkness forever."[539] By delivering the world from the apocalyptic gloom wrought by Venus—which had hitherto acted as an obstructive force blocking Creation—the Morning Star paved the way for the glorious period of light and fertility to follow. Gene Weltfish's synopsis of Skidi cosmogony might well serve as a primer for ancient cosmogony in general: "In the creation story, fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness."[540]

The oppressive darkness attending Creation was commemorated in sacred rituals around the globe. Here, too, Eliade managed to deduce the essence of the symbolism in question even though he had no idea of the historical—i.e., celestial—events behind the rituals:

"The ritual production of fire reproduces the birth of the world. Which is why at the end of the year all fires are extinguished (a re-enactment of the Cosmic night), and rekindled on New Year's day (this is an enactment of the Cosmogony, the rebirth of the world)."[541]

The fact that the Zuni New Fire ceremony was purposely timed to coincide with the appearance of the Morning Star would appear to commemorate the latter's role as the archetypal fire-driller and "first light" to become manifest in the Darkness attending Creation, ideas otherwise familiar

[538] R. Linton, "The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee," *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History* 6 (1923), p. 13.
[539] *Ibid*.
[540] G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 106.
[541] M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago, 1978), p. 40.

from the sacred traditions surrounding the Skidi Morning Star and Quetzalcoatl. It is the Morning Star's actions as warrior-hero and fire-drill, after all, which appeared to spark Creation.

In addition to celebrating and reenacting Creation, New Year's rites serve to inaugurate a "new" era. The symbolism of this New Age, in turn, is patterned after the cataclysmic events at the Dawn of Time wherein the warrior-planet was conceptualized as having reestablished order after waging deadly combat against the powers of darkness and chaos. The Skidi myth of cosmogony recounting how the Morning Star Mars overcame the apocalyptic darkness associated with Venus is paradigmatic in this regard. The Old Babylonian myth (BM 96739) describing the warrior-star Dumuzi's defeat of the chaos-powers prior to his *hieros gamos* with Venus belongs here as well even though its original cosmogonic context has been largely obscured and hitherto overlooked.

With a few notable exceptions, students of myth have failed to recognize the prominent role played by the mythical Morning Star (Mars) in the symbolism attached to the New Year and Creation. The traditions surrounding the Egyptian Horus are instructive in this regard:

"The appearance of Horus in the sky just before dawn is the mark of the new year. Out of the fear and confusion of Seth's reign, the time of troubles, has come the herald of the new dispensation. The world's great age begins anew."[542]

Horus's triumphant appearance at Creation was still remembered several thousand years later. Thus it is that the god's rites at Edfu celebrated his glorious manifestation at the Dawn of Time where, in the form of a falcon, he brought light to a world overcome by darkness and chaos:

"All was in darkness and the waters of Nun covered the earth…A falcon [Horus] emerged from the surrounding darkness and alighted on the stick. Immediately, light broke over Chaos, and the falcon sitting on his perch transformed the island into a holy place. The antiquity of this tradition

[542] R. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959), p. 217.

is attested by the fact that, in the Archaic Period, the hieroglyphic sign for 'god' consisted of a falcon sitting on a perch."[543]

In ancient Mexico it was Quetzalcoatl who inaugurated the New Age. Summarizing the symbolism associated with the god-king's translation to heaven, Graulich states simply: "Quetzalcoatl leaves, establishes the underworld, and throws himself into a fire to become the morning star, inaugurating a new era."[544]

In native artworks Quetzalcoatl was depicted drilling the first fire and upholding the heavens, thereby complementing those traditions describing him as Creator. In the case of Quetzalcoatl a "historicizing" trend is evident that has converted the mythical Morning Star into a terrestrial king of flesh and blood, the latter remembered as the "first lord to sit on the throne" and culture-hero par excellence.

Coming as it did in the wake of a spectacular cataclysm of apocalyptic proportions, the glorious Epiphany of the Morning Star/Mars as the "first light" signaled the defeat of the powers of Darkness and the reestablishment of order. At the same time, the awe-inspiring splendor of Mars heralded the Creation to follow. The Morning Star's primeval Epiphany was characterized as follows by Michel Graulich:

"An age begins with the expulsion from paradise, the arrival of death, and the separation of heaven and earth. It is total darkness. However, there is at once a mediation: earthly fire, maize, and Venus appear. The dead live in Mictlan, ruled by the Morning Star, the first light of the world."[545]

In sacred traditions telling of the trials and tribulations during that period of chaos and instability preceding Creation and the reordering of the world—particularly those which have become "historicized"—the Morning Star often appears as a celestial "Moses," serving as a "guiding

[543] B. Watterson, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1984), pp. 105-106.
[544] M. Graulich, "Myths of Paradise Lost in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," *Current Anthropology* 24:5 (1983), p. 578.
[545] M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 258.

light" to the tribal ancestors while leading them out of the apocalyptic darkness and towards a new place of settlement. Motseyoef, as we have seen, was renowned for guiding the ancestors of the Cheyenne from their original homeland in the North.[546] The Toltecs assigned this role to Quetzalcoatl. According to the Zuni elders, it was Ahaiyúta, the Morning Star, who "guided them [the ancients] to the Middle of the World, where we now live."[547]

Far from being confined to the New World, the mythical motif of the Morning Star as an ancestral guide or leader during a primeval "wandering" or colonizing venture is attested around the globe. Witness the following tradition from Aboriginal Australia (Northeast Arnhem Land):

"My own people, the Riratjingu, are descended from the great Djankawu who came from the island of Baralku far across the sea. Our spirits return to Baralku when we die. Djankawu came in his canoe with his two sisters, following the morning star which guided them to the shores of Yelangbara on the eastern coast of Arnhem Land."[548]

An analogous tradition is found amongst the Polynesian Islanders who, much like the Phoenicians, were justly renowned for their far-flung colonizing voyages. In addition to their remarkable navigational skills and physical courage, the Polynesians possessed an extensive body of sky lore. One Tahitian chant celebrates the Morning Star as a guide to sailors:

"The king of the golden (yellow) skies slept with his wife Fanoui, the only king is born; of her is the king Fauroua or the star of morning, the great king. It is he who gives decrees to the night and the day, to the stars, to the Moon, to the sun, and serves as a guide to sailors."[549]

As the "great king" and Morning Star, Fauroua forms a close analogue to the Mexican Quetzalcoatl.

[546] R. Schukies, *Red Hat* (Hamburg, 1993), p. 35.
[547] F. Cushing, *Zuñi Folk Tales* (New York, 1901), p. 368.
[548] J. Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming, 40,000 years of Australian History* (Sydney, 1980), p. 4.
[549] R. Williamson, *Religious Beliefs and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia, Vol. 1* (London, 1933), p. 120.

In light of the fact that the mythical Morning Star is to be identified with the planet Mars, it stands to reason that an analogous symbolism would come to surround the leading Mars-gods. And such is indeed the case. The ancient Hawaiians, themselves the product of a Polynesian colonizing venture, credit a "red star" with leading them to Hawaii:

"Makalii was a famous steersman of the canoes of Hawaii-nui and a great farmer…A certain star used as a guide to land in the firmament of Hawaii is named Makalii after him. It is a red star."[550]

As the "red star," the planet Mars here performs the role otherwise associated with the mythical Morning Star.

The tutelary god of Phoenician colonizing ventures was Melqart, invoked as *Archegetes*, "chief (or first) leader."[551] The very same symbolism is associated with the Greek Heracles, who was invoked as *Archegetes* and *Soter*—"savior"—as a patron and protector of voyages in ancient inscriptions.[552]

In ancient Greece, it was Apollo who spearheaded the primeval migration (Apollo was identified with the Morning Star Aziz/Phosphoros at Apulum).[553] According to the traditional myth, Apollo had immigrated to Greece from far away—often identified as the Hyperborean mountains in the distant North—whereupon he established the new order. The god's return was a joyous occasion and formed the subject of annual rites:

"One of the most characteristic myths about Apollo is the one relating his arrival from the Hyperboreans who live in the utopian margin of the world. Every year the happy arrival of Apollo was celebrated."[554]

[550] M. Makemson, *The Morning Star Rises* (New Haven, 1941), p. 131.
[551] KAI 47.
[552] L. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (Oxford, 1921), p. 170. See also B. Bergquist, *Herakles on Thasos* (Uppsala, 1973), p. 36.
[553] H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980), p. 171.
[554] H. S. Versnel, "Apollo and Mars One Hundred Years after Roscher," *Visible Religion* 4 (1986), p. 139.

Apollo's arrival from afar signaled the New Year. Hendrik Versnel has called attention to this aspect of the god's cult: "Apollo's arrival inaugurated a new season or a new year."[555]

The Latin god Mars fulfilled a similar role in Roman religion. Like Apollo, Mars was intimately associated with the New Year:

"They were represented as being born or arriving from distant regions…Apollo, who is invited to come by means of *humnoi kletikoi*. In Rome, however, the birth (or arrival) of Mars is unique. With the coming of the god a new period begins: both Apollo and Mars are connected with the first month of the year."[556]

The detailed parallelisms between the Greek Apollo and Latin Mars were first documented by Wilhelm Roscher in the latter half of the 19th century but have been all but ignored in the meantime.[557] Yet as Versnel has documented in a recent study corroborating Roscher's principal findings, the gods are "structural—and functional—duplicates."[558] For our purposes here we would simply note the fact that there is a significant overlap between the traditions surrounding Mars and Apollo and myths involving the mythical Morning Star. Thus, as the mythical Morning Star was said to "guide" the original settlers to their new homeland so, too, were Apollo and Mars renowned as great colonizers, leading the ancient Greeks and Latin tribes on their various migrations:

"Both gods are frequently pictured as ancestors of tribes and nations and founders of cities: *patrooi* and *archegetai*…In this connection it is important that both gods function as leaders and guides in colonizing expeditions, particularly of the type which bears the Latin name of *ver sacrum*: if the gods are angry and manifest their wrath by epidemics or failure of crops, a group of youths is consecrated to the god and expelled. Under the guidance of the god, who sometimes

[555] *Ibid*., p. 144.
[556] *Ibid*., p. 138.
[557] W. Roscher, *Studien zur vergleichenden Mythologie der Griechen und Römer: Apollon und Mars* (Leipzig, 1873).
[558] H.S. Versnel, *op. cit*., p. 152.

takes the shape of an animal, they roam the wilderness in search of a place suitable for a new settlement."[559]

The animal form most often assumed by the Latin god was that of a wolf. It was in this guise that Mars is said to have led the Hirpini to their new homeland.[560] Similar traditions surround the archaic Apollo—hence the epithet *Lykeios*, the "wolf."[561] Horus, too, was known to assume a canine form.[562] It was as a wolf or jackal that the Egyptian god is said to have led the sacred procession at Abydos.[563] Doubtless it is not without good reason that Greek emigrants to Egypt early on identified their beloved Apollo with Horus.[564] Nor, for that matter, should it come as a surprise to find that ancient Babylonian astronomers conceptualized the planet Mars as the "wolf-star."[565]

In Cheyenne lore the culture hero Motseyoef was a renowned shapeshifter, alternately appearing as a coyote or wolf.[566] And much like the Greek Apollo, the Cheyenne Morning Star was prone to being absent for long periods of time:

"Now see that I have come back. I have been gone a long time, and have been to a place far away, where I have seen many wonderful things. The spiritual men (*maiyun*) that I saw at this place gave me medicine to doctor with, to cure you people when you are sick."[567]

This propensity for disappearing for long periods, only to return as a savior bringing cultural and medical innovations, constitutes an archetypal characteristic of the mythical Morning Star. In addition to the example provided by Motseyoef, the same symbolism attaches to Apollo and Mars.

[559] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[560] V. Rosivach, "Mars, The Lustral God," *Latomus* 42 (1983), p. 520.
[561] L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. IV* (New Rochelle, 1977), pp. 114-117.
[562] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), p. 92.
[563] *Ibid*.
[564] B. Watterson, *op. cit*., p. 104.
[565] P. Gössmann, *Planetarium Babylonicum* (Rome, 1950), p. 65.
[566] G. Grinnell, *op. cit.,* p. 308.
[567] *Ibid*., p. 300.

Mars' primeval role in dispelling the powers of darkness—the latter often interpreted as a cloud of noxious pests—led to its being conceptualized as an averter of pests or pestilence. All prominent Mars-gods—Nergal, Mars, Apollo, Reseph, etc.—are renowned for averting one natural disaster or another.[568] Thus, the Latin god Mars was invoked as *Averruncus*—"averter of evil traits."[569] Apollo, similarly, was invoked as *Alexikakos*, "averter of evil."[570] In ancient Egypt, Horus was celebrated as the warder off of noxious creatures.[571] Nergal was implored to rid the land of pestilence, as was his Canaanite counterpart Reseph.[572] In apotropaic magic, moreover, Nergal was deemed to protect the house against intruding evil.[573] The latter idea is exactly paralleled in the cult of Heracles, who was invoked as Kallinikos as a protector of the house: "Let no evil enter here, for the son of Zeus, Heracles Kallinikos, lives here."[574]

As unusual as such ideas appear at first sight, precise parallels are to be found in the New World as well. A curious legend preserved by the Toba Indians of South America refers to the planet Mars as the ridder of noxious pests:

"The flies, the mosquitos and the gadflies, were exiled by the god Mars, whom the superior divinities ordered to exterminate all vermin that could hurt the creatures emerging from the courageous hearts of the principal deities."[575]

By a natural train of thought, the planet-god's role as the averter of noxious pests and evil influences led him to be viewed as a healing agent. This idea is especially evident in the aforementioned traditions surrounding the Cheyenne Motseyoef, but it is also attested in the traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl, who was also invoked as a healer:

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[568] See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 179-185.
[569] W. Roscher, *Studien zur vergleichenden Mythologie der Griechen und Römer: Apollon und Mars* (Leipzig, 1873), pp. 51-64.
[570] L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. IV* (New Rochelle, 1977), p. 175.
[571] See here the insightful discussion of R. Ritner, "Horus on the Crocodiles," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 103-116.
[572] E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), p. 22; W. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Reßep* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 12, 24.
[573] F. Wiggermann, "Nergal," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol.* 9 (Berlin, 1999), p. 222.
[574] C. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses* (New York, 1992), p. 58.
[575] Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, "Mitologia sudamericana," *Revista del Museo de La Plata* 27 (1923/1925), p. 272.

"The annual ceremony to Quetzalcoatl here is also described, which featured dancing by the merchants and lords and comic impersonations of deformed and diseased individuals and animals on a large platform in the patio of the temple. These had serious ritualistic overtones, for Quetzalcoatl was held to be '*abogado de las bubas y del mal de los ojos y del romadico y tosse*.' During their mimic performances, the participants uttered pleas to this god for health, while sufferers from these afflictions came to his temple with prayers and offerings."[576]

In South America the Sherente remember the planet Mars as a great healer. Witness the following tradition recorded by Curt Nimuendajú:

"Mars' pupils are considered good doctors…It is the pupils of Mars who hold communication with poisonous snakes and cure their bites."[577]

Analogous beliefs surround Apollo, Horus, Mars, and Reseph. Under the name *Paieon*, Apollo was invoked as the physician and healer of the gods.[578] Horus, likewise, was invoked as the "physician for Osiris."[579] The Latin god Mars was invoked as a healer well into modern times, especially in England.[580] Even Heracles, according to Herodotus, was remembered as a great "diviner and physician."[581]

As the god of war and pestilence, Nergal/Mars would seem to be the last fellow you would expect to be associated with health and healing. And yet in ancient Mesopotamia Nergal was regarded as the ultimate source of health and well-being.[582] Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that he was invoked as *mu-bal-lit mitu*, "he who can cause the dead to live." This epithet, as Curtis observed long ago, would appear to characterize Nergal as a god of resurrection: "This

[576] H. Nicholson, *op. cit*., p. 107, citing Duran. The Latin phrase in question translates as "the advocate for tumors, eye disease, colds, and coughing."
[577] C. Nimuendajú, "The Íerenté*," op. cit*., pp. 89-90.
[578] K. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (London, 1982), p. 143.
[579] R. T. Clark, *op. cit*., p. 162.
[580] M. Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art* (London, 1992), pp. 114-115.
[581] R. de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, 1971), op. 244, citing Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I, 15, 73.
[582] E. von Weiher, *op. cit*., p. 22.

may mean literally that Nergal is the one who raises the dead."[583] Who better to resurrect the dead than the planet-god who himself had experienced resurrection?[584]

[583] J. Curtis, "An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957), p. 154.
[584] Note also that the planet Mars, as Salbatanu, was invoked to resurrect the dead. See E. Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung"* (Berlin, 1953), p. 9.

Conclusion

"If you have had your attention directed to the novelties of thought in your own lifetime, you will have observed that almost all really new ideas have a certain aspect of foolishness when they are first produced."[585]

The greatest goddess of ancient Mesopotamia was Inanna, expressly identified with the planet Venus. Early myths tell of her tragic and tempestuous love affair with the youthful Dumuzi, the latter described as a great warrior and brilliant star in heaven. A prominent rite in the New Year's celebration saw the king (as Dumuzi) simulating a "marriage" with Inanna/Venus—a marriage thought to legitimize the king's hold on the throne while ensuring fertility throughout the land.

Very similar ideas are attested in the New World. According to the Skidi Pawnee of the North American Plains, the planet Venus was the great Mother Goddess who, like Inanna, was also represented as a formidable warrior. The planet-goddess eventually met her match in the Morning Star Mars who, as the most virile of warriors, first conquered and then impregnated her. It was this "marriage" between Venus and Morning Star that set Creation in motion. Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that sacred rites designed to commemorate the *hieros gamos* between the two stars were believed to ensure fertility throughout the land.

It is our contention that the Amerindian traditions serve to complement and clarify the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi. The fact that the Skidi identified the planet Venus as the female agent in a prototypical "marriage of the stars" confirms the original celestial context of the Sumerian sacred marriage rite—a fact consistently overlooked by entire generations of scholars on ancient myth and religion. Especially important is the fact that the Skidi myth allows us to deduce the celestial prototype for Dumuzi: Inanna's youthful paramour is to be identified with the planet Mars. As a warring star and consort of the planet Venus, Dumuzi offers a close analogue to the Skidi Morning Star Mars.

[585] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*.

At the outset of this inquiry we posed the following question: Why would Sumerian kings seek (or expect) legitimization for their rule through a symbolic marriage with the planet Venus, the latter personified by Inanna? In ancient Mesopotamia, as elsewhere, a king's rule could only acquire legitimacy by emulating or reenacting an archetypal prototype—in this case by emulating the behavior of Dumuzi/Mars *in illo tempore*, at which time the planetary hero succeeded in marrying Inanna/Venus and, as a result, gained sovereignty and all its glories (empowerment, beautification, apotheosis, etc). By engaging in a mimetic ritualized marriage with the planet Venus, Sumerian kings were presumably operating under the widespread belief that by carefully simulating the prototypical events in question a sympathetic magical result could be effected—i.e., it would lead to *their* empowerment and deification while promoting fertility throughout the land.

What was true in ancient Mesopotamia was true around the globe: It was the planet Venus that embodied sovereignty and, in the guise of the Mother Goddess, it was she who invested the king with his regal powers and crown of glory. This belief-system prevailed in ancient Persia, for example, where Anahita/Venus represented sovereignty and conferred "glory" or power on kings and heroes.

Analogous beliefs are attested in ancient Egypt, where Isis/Venus was explicitly identified with the throne and thought to imbue the king—as Horus—with his regal powers. The "embrace" of the Mother Goddess, in turn, resulted in the "beautification" of Horus. Recall again Jan Assmann's description of Isis as "kingmaker":

"As mother of the Horus child, Isis…is not only the great healing goddess, but also the bestower of legitimate kingship. Her milk not only heals illness, it makes the child a king, it 'creates,' as the Egyptian terminology puts it, his 'beauty.' Isis is the 'kingmaker' par excellence…In Egypt, the legitimate salvation-bringing king was not the 'anointed one,' but the 'suckled one.' Many

temple reliefs, particularly from the New Kingdom, represent him in this role, in the arms and at the breast of the mother-goddess Isis."[586]

If the planet Venus was conceptualized as the prototypical Mother Goddess and stellar embodiment of sovereignty, Mars was deemed the prototypical warrior-hero and king. Hence it is that Horus—explicitly identified as the "Morning Star"—represents the "model and forerunner of every ruling king."[587] What was paradigmatic in ancient Egypt was also deemed to be paradigmatic in ancient Mesoamerica, where Quetzalcoatl—as the mythical Morning Star—was celebrated as the model king and "first lord to sit on the throne." Such ideas have their origin in a specific historical event and commemorate the enthroning and kingship of the planet Mars—the mythical Morning Star—at the Dawn of Time.

In Horus and Quetzalcoatl, the historian of religions is confronted with the two greatest gods of the Egyptian and Mexican pantheons, respectively. It stands to reason that any insight into their fundamental nature and/or stellar identification is bound to have profound and wide-ranging ramifications for the history of religion in particular and a scientific understanding of ancient culture in general. Ancient myth still has much to teach us, although you would never know it from reading the textbooks.

In Skidi lore, the Morning Star was identified with the planet Mars and remembered as the "first star" to appear at Creation. Were it not that analogous traditions surround the mythical Morning Star in Mesoamerica and South America, the Skidi report might easily go unnoticed or be ignored as irrelevant or misguided in nature. Yet it would be difficult to find a more important report in all of ancient lore. The Skidi tradition, properly understood, traces to Mars' spectacular Epiphany at the Dawn of Time, wherein it signaled the defeat of the powers of Darkness and the onset of a new Age of light and order. Mars' brilliant manifestation and death-defying feats at the Dawn of Time are celebrated in sacred myths around the globe and stand at the very heart of what it means to be a hero (or god, for that matter).

[586] J. Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt," in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 134.
[587] S. Brandon, "Myth and Sacred Narratives: Egypt," in S. Johnson ed., *Religions of the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 578.

Equally significant is the sacred tradition preserved by the Makiritare of South America, referenced earlier, wherein it is reported that the planet Mars climbed to heaven on a giant ladder and shone forth as the "first star" at Creation. In addition to forming a remarkable parallel to the Skidi Pawnee report denoting Mars as the first star to appear at Creation, the Makiritare report finds a curious reminiscence in Assyro-Babylonian myth, wherein Nergal/Mars was described as climbing to heaven along a colossal staircase.

It is important to underscore the thoroughly anomalous nature of such traditions. It would be extremely unlikely and wholly unexpected were any *one* culture to describe the planet Mars as the "first" star to appear at Creation. Yet it is nothing less than impossible that distinct cultures from more than one continent would "invent" the same report, one that has no discernible rational basis with reference to the familiar appearance and/or behavior of the red planet. Properly understood, the Skidi report of Mars' appearance as the "first star" constitutes an authentic—if vestigial—memory of an actual historical experience and, in this sense, it is every bit as significant and compelling as the vestigial hind limbs of modern whales.

And so it is with hundreds of recurring mythological themes and patterns. How else, but as a valid memory of extraordinary historical events, are we to explain Mars' role as driller of the first fire? How else are we to account for Mars' reputation as an agent of fertility? Why would the red planet be deemed a great colonizer? Why was the planet Venus described as an indomitable warrior in early Mesopotamian texts as well as in Skidi lore? Why was Venus deemed to be the "divine source of all life" by the Sumerians and Skidi alike? And of all the planets, why was the planet Venus associated with sovereignty, marriage rites, and sacred gardens?

If recounting the events of Creation comprised a primary function of ancient myth, it is inevitable that sacred traditions around the globe will tell of the scintillating union of Venus and Mars. That said, the ravages of time and disjunctions in transmission have taken their toll with the predictable result that this greatest of all romance tales is not always recognizable as an

extraordinary encounter of planetary powers. Who among us would discern a coupling of planets in Homer's telling of Aphrodite's liaison with Ares?

The modifying effects of localization and creative storytelling are aptly illustrated by the Star Woman myth. Ostensibly recounting an amorous encounter between a Star Woman and a lowly mortal, a prominent motif finds the latter being transfigured as a result of their liaison or marriage—usually he is described as beautified or otherwise rejuvenated or empowered. The Greek myth of Aphrodite and Phaon is paradigmatic in this regard, but very similar traditions are to be found around the globe.

In South America, as we have documented, Star Woman is expressly identified with the planet Venus. This datum constitutes substantial support for our thesis that early traditions surrounding Aphrodite originated in the dramatic recent history of the planet Venus. The Greek goddess's intimate association with sovereignty,[588] marriage-rites,[589] and sacred gardens points to the same conclusion.[590]

The Star Woman myth also serves to illuminate and corroborate the celestial context of the sacred marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi. Thus, Star Woman's imbuing of her mortal paramour with "radiance" or "beauty" forms a close structural analogue to the curious episode in BM 96739 whereby Dumuzi is transfigured and empowered by Inanna's splendor, the latter described as a luminous outpouring of power. Properly understood, the Star Woman myth—like the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi—commemorates an extraordinary conjunction of planets whereby the planet Mars was enveloped by the catastrophically charged corona of Venus.

[588] As witnessed by the epithet *Basileia*. Of the latter goddess, Karl Kerényi, *Goddesses of Sun and Moon* (Dallas, 1979), p. 44 observed: "Through marriage to this most beautiful maiden, one would receive lordship over the whole world. The word '*Basileia*,' differently accented, would commonly mean kingdom."
[589] Stephanie Budin, *The Origin of Aphrodite* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 21 writes: "The artistic evidence makes it abundantly clear that Aphrodite is the *sine qua non* of wedding ritual."
[590] *Ibid*., p. 30: "Before the goddess even reached the Greek mainland she was honored as a vegetal deity on Paphos as *Hierokepia*—the equivalent of the Athenian title *en Kepois*."

Far from being dead and buried,[591] the myth of the dying god constitutes an archetypal theme in ancient religion much as James Frazer theorized well over a century ago. Yet because he overlooked the astral aspects of Dumuzi, Adonis, Melkart, Quetzalcoatl, and analogous dáimõns around the globe, Frazer was denied the evidentiary *coup de grâce* that would seal his case: It was the dying god's apotheosis as a stellar body (Mars) that signaled his resurrection and represents the key to understanding his mythical biography.

Equally essential to deciphering the myth of the dying god are his manifold interactions with the planet Venus. It was Venus who mourned her paramour's "death" by flying about the skies with disheveled hair;[592] and it was the embrace of the planet-goddess that effected his glorification and resurrection. In their attempt to deny the archetypal nature of the dying god motif—or to make of Dumuzi a mortal king of flesh and blood—modern scholars show themselves to be woefully incompetent as interpreters of ancient myth and religion.

Archetypal myths like the marriage between Venus and Mars did not arise *de novo* or from some dark recesses of the Collective Unconscious. Nor, for that matter, do they commemorate the familiar and perfectly peaceful interactions of these two planets. Rather, there is a wealth of evidence that such myths commemorate truly extraordinary encounters with awe-inspiring planetary powers—an experience otherwise known as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*. As Thorkild Jacobsen and other scholars have argued, this experience is fundamental to all religion: "A confrontation with a 'Wholly Other' outside of normal experience and indescribable in its terms; terrifying, ranging from sheer demonic dread through awe to sublime majesty; and fascinating, with irresistible attraction, demanding unconditional allegiance."[593]

Such, in our opinion, was the essence of the Earthlings' encounter with Inanna/Venus and her beloved paramour.

[591] M. Smith, "The death of 'dying and rising gods' in the Biblical World," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998), pp. 257-313.
[592] E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 97-101.
[593] T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), p. 3.

This all-too-close and decidedly catastrophic encounter with the "gods" *in illo tempore* left an indelible mark on the human Psyche that persists to this very day, not all of which is conscious or cultural in nature. If we are to ever understand the fundamental message of ancient myth—not to mention the origin and stubborn persistence of religious belief systems—it is essential to recognize the observed patterns and recurring themes as the direct intellectual (behavioral/biological) response to witnessed *historical* events. Then, and only then, will a reality-based reconstruction of ancient history and religion be possible.